

INSIDE GIBRALTAR, by Colonel Charles W. Furlong

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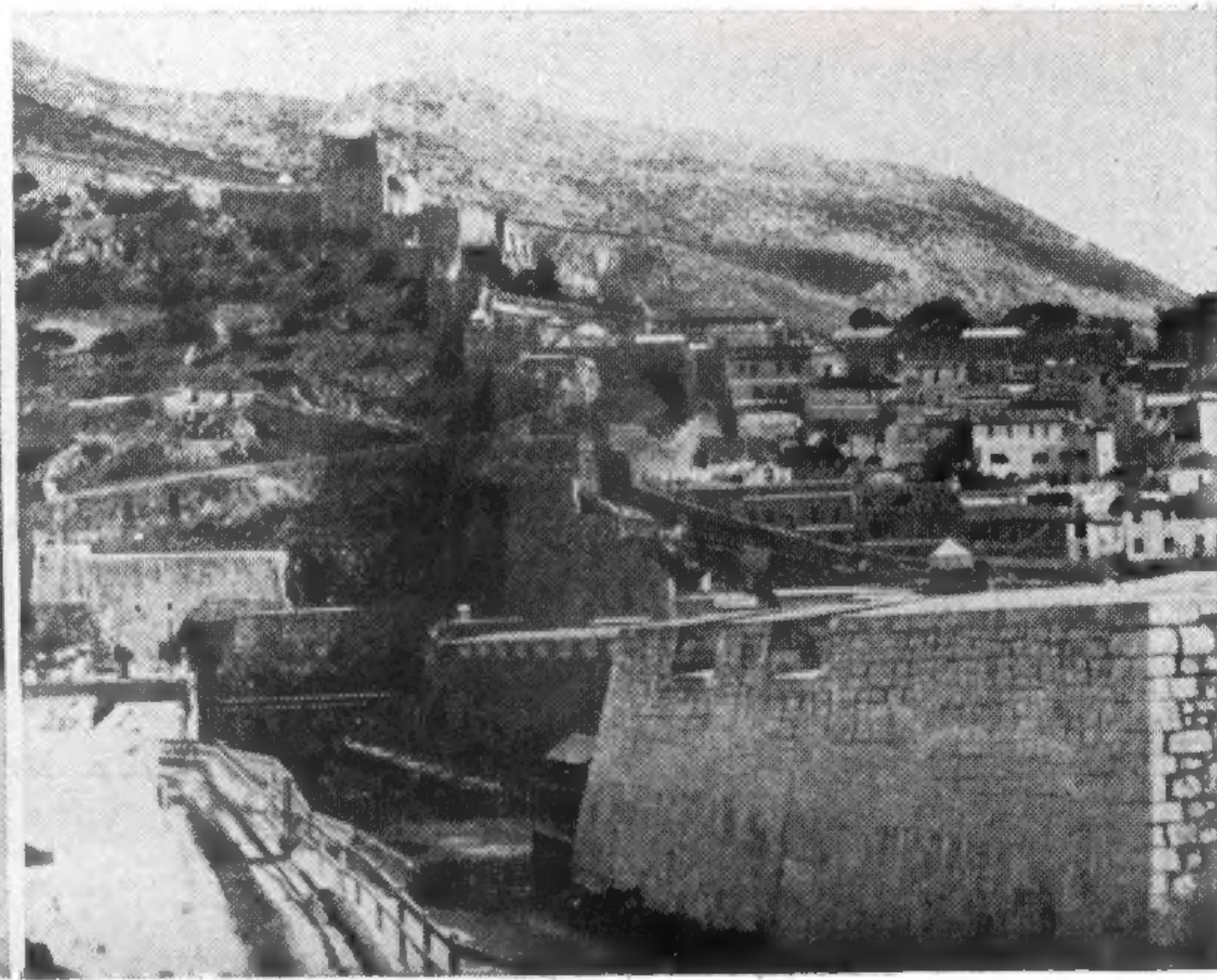
The impregnable and unfortified east side of Gibraltar; view taken near Signal Station showing Middle Hill (1211 ft.). The further peak (1356 ft.) contains Rock Gun, the highest piece of ordnance on the Rock.



At left is the fishing hamlet of Caleta, edging Catalan Bay, showing the first of the two great slides,

At left, below, is the city of Gibraltar, looking north toward Spain. Below the distant Spanish highlands enemy batteries have been established.

This northwest corner of Gibraltar (below) is the only place where it might be successfully approached by land. Note the dry moat which can be flooded,



Inside Gibraltar

Colonel Furlong's service as American military observer and his consequent friendships have enabled him to explore Gibraltar with a freedom seldom granted even to Britons; and he gives us a remarkable picture of this the world's most important fortress, in this, the hour of its greatest trial.

By COL. CHARLES
WELLINGTON FURLONG

"WHAT bore are these old cannon?" I innocently asked an off-duty red-coated sergeant, in Gibraltar, as I lounged on the ramparts of the old Line Wall one evening as the sun was setting behind Algeciras. The sergeant stiffened, gripped tighter his swagger-stick.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded. "You had better come with me to Major Wright."

If you wish to dodge trouble in Gibraltar, avoid inquisitiveness in regard to guns. But this was the first of my eight visits to that fortress, which more than any British outpost symbolizes the Empire's impregnability. "Firm as the Rock of Gibraltar" has become an adage, and the downfall of Gibraltar to Britain would not only be a severe naval and strategic loss, but would affect the morale of the British people.

Gibraltar is not only the key to the western doorway of the Mediterranean, but is the front door to the Suez Canal, the Dardanelles, the Straits of Malta and Otranto. The control of these maritime bottlenecks, also the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, at the foot of the Red Sea, and the Strait of Dover, directly affects the economic, political and military factors of Europe, and are objectives of the Axis Powers. The present conflict might well be called the War for the Seven Straits.

Britain's sea power not only keeps the Axis Powers from victory, but gives her the whiphand in blockade control. This particularly affects Italy. Not a shipload of much-needed supplies can reach that country from the outside world, not a bale of cotton or a sack of wheat from Egypt, or a barrel of oil from Syria and Iraq can reach either Italy or Germany,

unless Britain lifts the drawbridge of her contraband control. Supply of even much needed products from Italy's Mediterranean neighbors and her own province of Libya is seriously curtailed through the watchfulness of the British patrol.

The capture of Gibraltar by the Axis Powers, or rendering it useless as a naval base, would go far toward securing their control of its Strait with all it would include. This would lengthen Britain's sea route to Alexandria from 3,045 to 13,365 miles, and increase the hazards of the voyage. It would further isolate her fighting forces in the Near East from the homeland, curtail shipments of reinforcements, munitions and supplies, slow down oil supply to Britain from the Near East, and possibly prevent the rapid dispatch of units of the Mediterranean fleet to the defense of the British Isles.

Gibraltar is a great ridge of Jurassic limestone, three miles long, three-quarters of a mile wide at its greatest width, and seven miles in circumference. It lies due north and south, and forms the eastern flank of the semicircular Bay of Gibraltar. Its crenelated ridge rises a sheer one thousand feet at its North Front, continuing to almost fourteen hundred feet at Breakneck Stairs, the highest point. From there it drops by several steep declivities to Europa Point, its southern extremity.

Its western side, broken here and there by abrupt cliffs and covered with mottled patches of desert shrubs and flora, shunts up above Gibraltar City in an enormous slope to a long jagged crest. The east side is a sheer precipice broken only by an extensive thirty-five-degree slide of stone rubble. At the northern base of this slide nestles the only settlement on this side, the picturesque hamlet of Cal-



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MAGAZINE

VOL. 72, NO. 3

Two Short Novels, Complete

The Fun Farm Murder

Illustrated by Orson Lowell

By Thomas Duncan 121

Heirs of the Blue Sky

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

By Andrew Wood 146

Short Stories

The Great Knockin'-Down

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon

By Hugh Fullerton 36

Desert Cold

Illustrated by Percy Leason

By Louis Kaye 48

Lady on the Warpath

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

By Robert Mill 57

The Great Man

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

By Chandler Whipple 68

Neutral Spirits

Illustrated by Arthur Jameson

By Luke Short 102

The Swan of Usk

"The World Was Their Stage"—No. X. Illustrated by John Richard Flanagan

By H. Bedford-Jones 110

Two Serial Novels

Anything Might Happen

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

By F. Draco 6

Gold Ahoy!

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

By Gordon Keyne 80

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Inside Gibraltar

By Col. Charles Wellington Furlong 1 and 183

A remarkable description of the greatest fortress in the world, by a man who has really been through it.

Bombing Berlin

As told to Percy Michaelis 181

"None of us would have given up his seat in the plane," says this pilot, "for all the money in the world."

Bulldog Mickey

By Mickey Walker 189

A great champion carries on his story of exciting moments in the ring—and elsewhere.

Readers' Forum

67

Cover Design

Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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INSIDE GIBRALTAR

eta, edging the cove of Catalan Bay. About little St. Mary's Church cluster a group of diminutive cottages, occupied by descendants of Genoese fishermen. Here they live, their boats drawn up on the stretch of golden sand, lapped by the Mediterranean. Above them is the towering Rock, fragments of which at times crash down upon the red-tiled roofs of their little homes.

Gibraltar was first known to the Phœnicians. It was one of the Pillars of Hercules of the ancients, who called it Mons Calpe. The other pillar was Mount Abyla, at Cueta, fifteen miles across the Strait on the African shore, whence came the Moors who first inhabited it when they invaded Spain. This happened on a mid-spring day in the year 711. Tarik Ibn-Zeyad, a freebooting Moorish chief, landed on this rocky promontory, and so his followers named it the Geb-al-Tarik, (Mount of Tarik). From a corruption of these two words Gibraltar derives its name. It was the first landing-place of the Moors in western Europe, and their last point of departure.

DURING their occupancy the Moors constructed magnificent fortifications of hard cement known as *tapia*. Many of their walls, which extended up the precipitous sides of the Rock, are still standing, such as the old Moorish castle, with its Tower of Homage, and the various terraces and battlements below it. The Moors and Spaniards greased their primitive excavating tools with the sweat and blood and the tears of slave labor; the British followed with convict labor, replaced later by well-paid Spanish workmen. Today they continue the gnawing, which, with the heavy work of hauling and setting up the big guns, is done by four or five thousand Spaniards, who daily troop afoot from the town of La Linea across the Neutral Zone, and just before sunset go tramping back to Spain. But the garrison is being reinforced; British soldiers are now taking the place of Spanish workers, and even civilians are something of a novelty in "Gib."

What right has Great Britain to Gibraltar, anyway? How did she come by it? Can she successfully defend it? Britain holds Gibraltar by the same title as those who held it before her: the title of conquest. The Spaniards took it from the Moors; the Moors grabbed it



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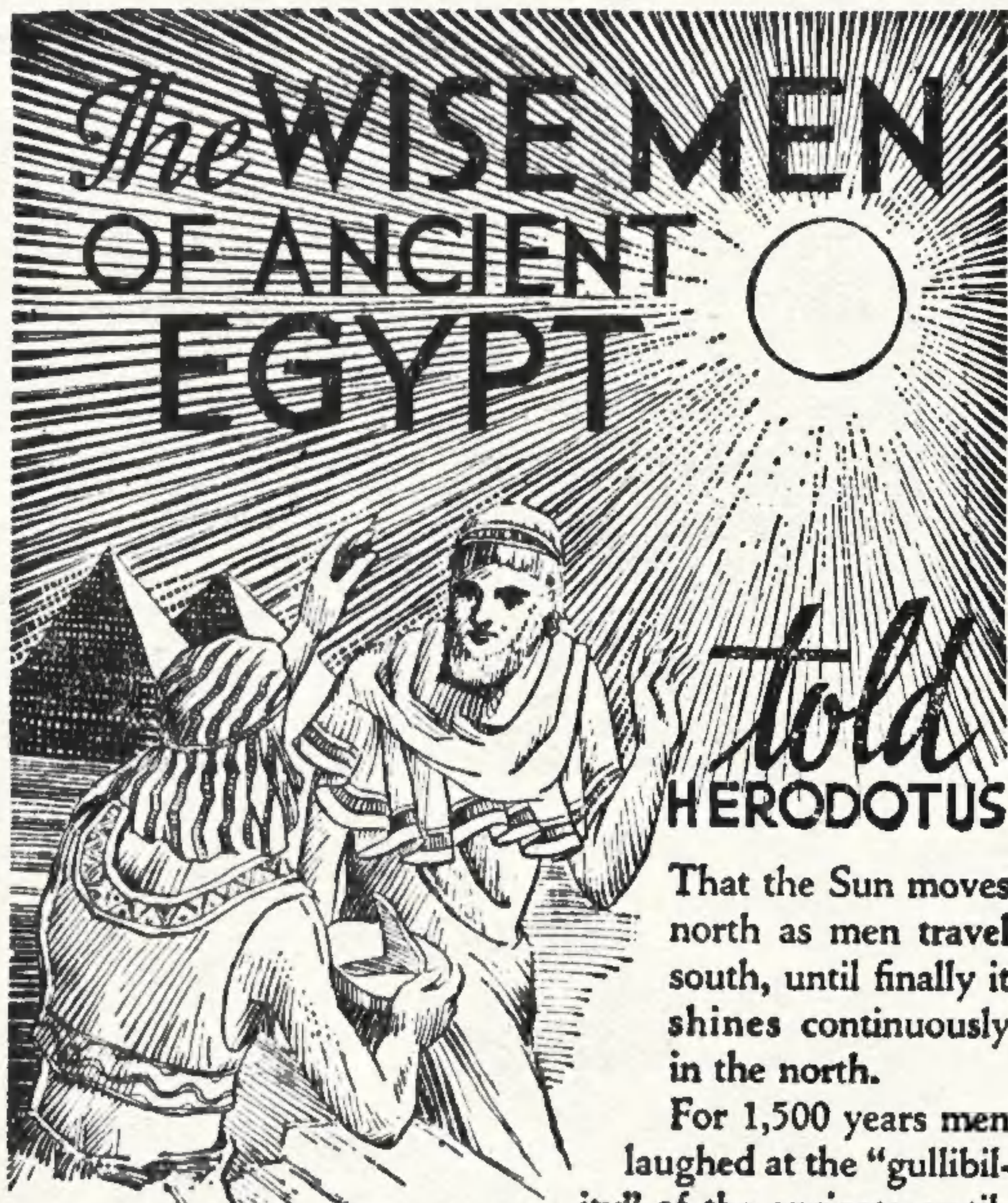
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back. Again the Spaniards took it and held it from 1462 until the War of the Spanish Succession, when, in 1704, the British, helped by the Dutch, acquired it by the regularly approved European method—they just took it. Since then the Spaniards have tried to recover it, but the Union Jack still floats over this inestimably important fortress.

From the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini, with both claim and acclaim, has been constantly shouting "Tu-

nisia! Djibouti! Suez!" and included the names of a number of other soft spots of Britain and France that he feels he can squeeze into the rubber bag of Italy Irredenta. But Franco quietly, though no less persistently, has filed his claim for the restoration of Gibraltar to Spain. Undoubtedly Hercules Hitler induced Mussolini to climb on the Axis bandwagon, by the promise of these places as fruits of anticipated victory, including the extension of Italy's possessions westward toward the frontiers of ancient Libya. To Spain he has been willing to cede not only the International Strip of Tangier, but also restore to Spain her golden apple of the Hesperides, Gibraltar.

When Gibraltar was taken by the English, and the Spanish inhabitants were offered full rights of property and citizenship by taking an oath of allegiance to their conquerors, they not only refused but moved out bag and baggage into Spain, and settled in near-by San Roque and the surrounding *campo*. There they and their descendants lived under a royal patent which declares that in all public acts the people of San Roque are "the inhabitants of Gibraltar residing in San Roque." So two cities of Gibraltar may be said to exist, one occupied by the British, the other composed of Spaniards whose fathers had fled from the actual city, with all its archives and titled deeds of their properties. These documents are all still carefully preserved, and the present people of San Roque, heirs to these properties, form the nucleus of that urge, in the Spanish mind and heart, to effect the recovery of the Mount of Tarik.

SPAIN wants Gibraltar back, and today Germany is in a position to help attempt to get it. Britain, it is said, has recently offered Spain certain concessions, including the Moroccan-Tangiers Zone and the return of Gibraltar—after the war. What offers Germany and Italy are matching against Britain's will probably shortly be known. Probably they too are offering Spain the same concessions—but now, as soon as Gibraltar is taken. Serrano Suner, Franco's brother-in-law, has been the leading Spanish irredentist, as far as Gibraltar is concerned. He considers that the opening phase of the present European conflict began in Spain, and has implied that Spain has done enough fighting and de-

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serves a share in the spoils of an Axis victory.

Since the opening of the Suez Canal, the importance of Gibraltar has been greatly increased. Placed on the greatest natural waterway of the world, on the direct route of the Mediterranean, East Africa, Persia, India and China trades, it is a valuable fueling station between the United Kingdom and the East. The area of Gibraltar is about seven square miles. Only about half this area is inhabited, and in peacetime supports over nineteen thousand civilian inhabitants, known as Rock Scorpions, and about six thousand military.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the limited area of this great barren-appearing rock abounds in interest. Directly under the frowning height of the towering North Front is a mile-long isthmus which connects Gibraltar with Spain. Here are the British recreation grounds, which extend to the British Lines, from where the sandy Neutral Zone stretches a half-mile to the Spanish Lines. The Rock's social life, with its clubs, theater, sports, fox-hunting in Spain, bird- and wild-boar-hunting in Morocco, give entertainment, while its Hispano-Moorish architecture and bazaars stamp it as a fascinating outpost of the East.

The geological history of this huge, isolated mass of compact grayish-white limestone of Lower Jurassic Age, with its upheavals and subsidences, makes the story of the Rock of Gibraltar of more

(Please turn to page 183)



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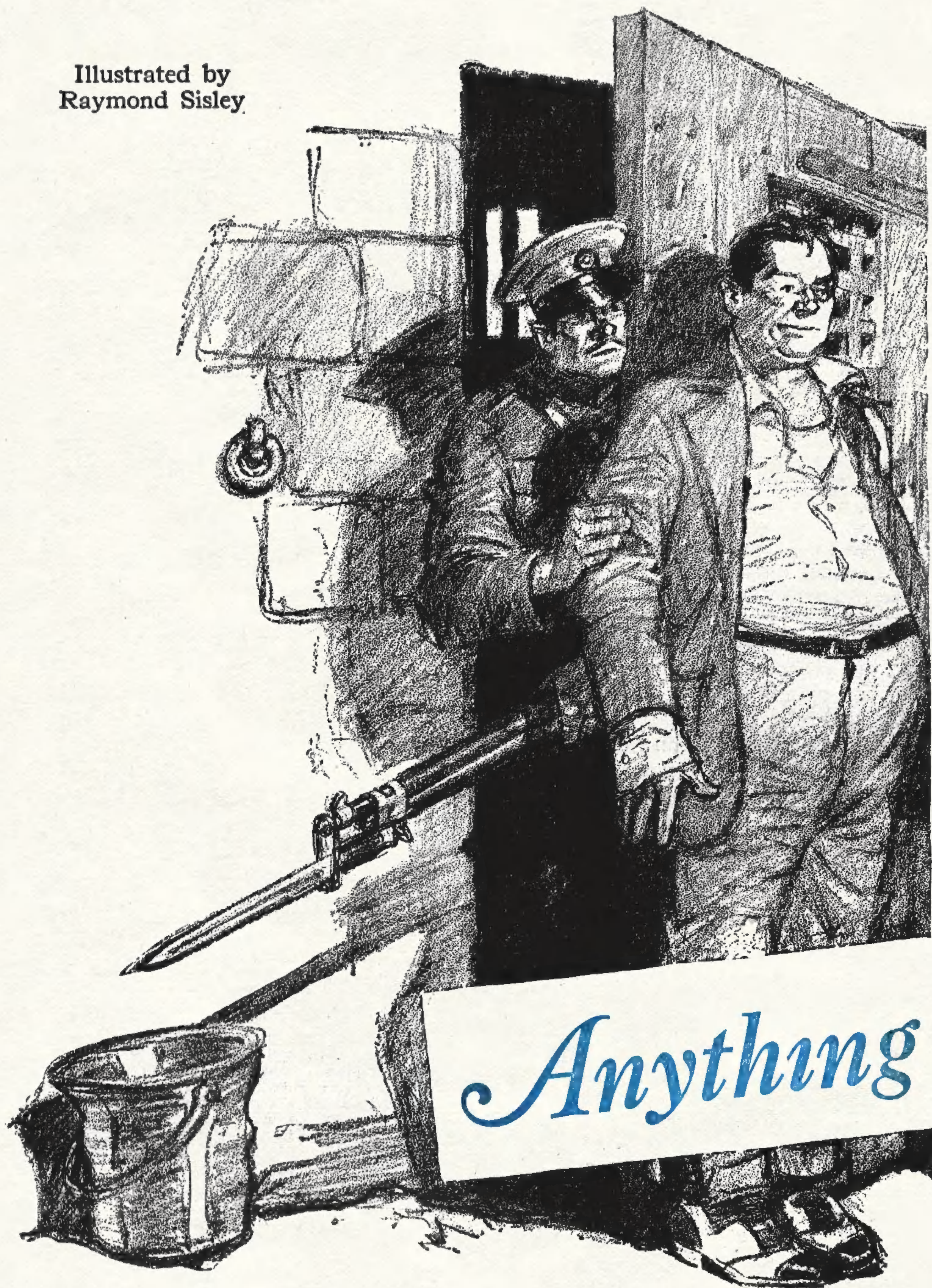
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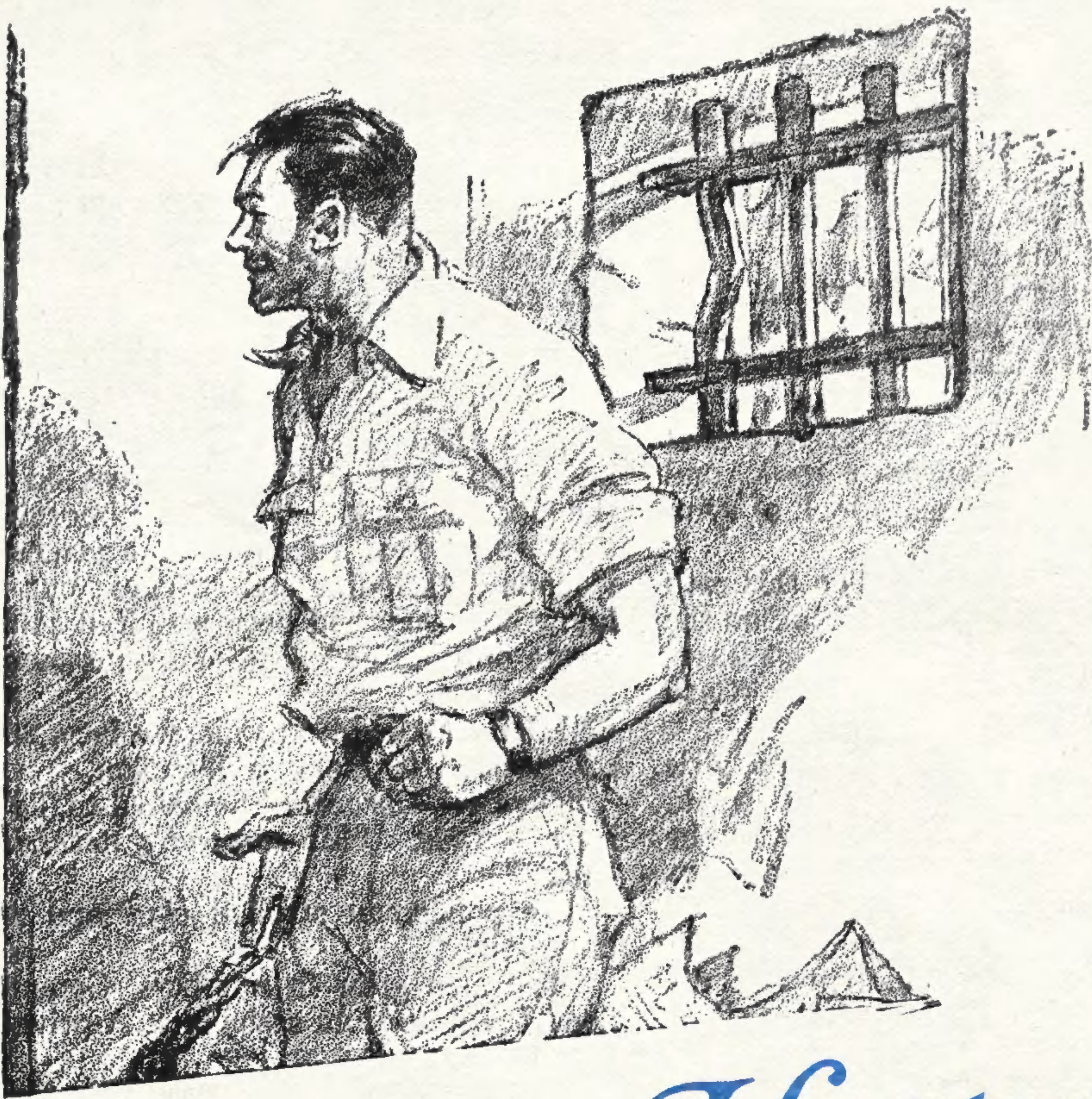


SHEP REEVES sat on the porch of the superintendent's house at Riobar with his assistant Ted Phillips, idly watching the Saturday pay-off line. Except that they were both Americans, the two men had little in common; but together they ran the most remote banana plantation in Panama, the experiment which had been planted in the heart of the Indian country. Together they lived here, day in and day out, fifty hours from civilization—or from any authority but their own—the two white

bosses over five hundred men, tan, coffee-colored and black.

The barefooted laborers were shuffling through the dust in front of them, banana-stained shirts sticking to sweaty backs. The Negroes and mozos jostled each other good-humoredly, exchanging crude jokes; the Indians stood in expressionless silence. Mr. Johnson, paymaster and storekeeper, kept shoving the envelopes through an improvised wicket into the strong brown hands. He was a Britisher, from Jamaica, with a dash of

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Might Happen



Two men from the States undertake a dangerous undercover job south of Panama.

By F. DRACO

Negro blood which it was impolite to notice except by treating him with unusual formality. The smell of many races hung thick in the still hot air.

"I give you the tropics," Ted yawned, "I give you *all* of the tropics, for one tall glass of something with real ice in it."

"Well, *hombre*," answered Shep, with the lazy good nature of a fat man, "this time when we are in Colón, we'll get that ice-machine fixed. I keep forgetting it."

"The hell with the ice-machine! What made me come down here in the first

place? I had to pick Amalgamated Fruit out of the telephone-book just because it sounded romantic. . . . I read too much about the rustling palms and the bright blue Caribbean. Nuts!"

Ted strode up and down like a restless cat, slapping the two-inch belt which emphasized his slim waist, banging his hard thigh against the gun strapped to it. Shep watched him with amusement.

"When you've been here twenty years instead of two, you'll learn not to sweat more than you have to."

"I hope to God I never learn! Nothing else ever happens."

"It aint what happens," said Shep, wisely. "It's what *might* happen that counts."

"Nuts! The sun gets up, and we get up with it and ride the farms; and the sun goes down, and we sit in this damned matchbox and listen to the locusts that can't sing but one tune."

Shep grinned and tilted back his chair until its thin legs looked as though they would have to collapse under his bulk. There was another white man on the porch,—Horton,—who had arrived that morning to relieve them for a week; and with him Shep exchanged a look of sympathetic understanding.

"Boy, you'll feel better when this mob gets paid, and we steam for Colón on the old *Inepequina*. I sure can use this leave. I wonder if that little girl on Cash Street still remembers me?"

"Sure she remembers you. All the girls remember you. So then, we get drunk. So then, we get into a crap-game at the club. So then, we bring our hangovers back to this mudhole. So what?"

"Well," said Shep, maintaining a judicious immobility, "people live and die here. That's all they do anywhere."

"In other places," Ted stated flatly, "they make the whole thing seem more exciting."

Shep chuckled and shrugged off the argument. Ted stood in a corner of the porch staring at a scene so familiar that it made his eyes ache—a scene he had once thought beautiful.

The small clearing barely gave breathing-space to the house, the commissary, the straggling laborers' shacks. The single track of the banana railroad scratched a dusty scar through the growth, then curved and disappeared into a welter of thick bush. Beyond, the gray-green jungle stretched for unmeasured miles, until it rose to meet the distant Cordilleras, and all these signs of civilization were only blots on a setting of imperturbable beauty, blots on the white curving crescent of the shore between the crowns of the palms and the still blue water.

THE laborers continued to shuffle on through the dust; and Mr. Johnson's fingers sorted envelopes with mechanical regularity. A little figure strutted up and down the lines, watching them, his gun in its holster. He was the Panamanian policeman assigned to Riobar. At Riobar were five hundred men of mixed

blood. The Negroes were the strongest, the *mozos* the most active, the Indians completely intractable and useless except to fire the locomotives or load bananas on the boats. To deal with all this had come little José Agrada, lieutenant of police.

Since the white bosses had it well in hand, it was a nice quiet post. The pay-off was his big moment, when with buttons newly shined he could march up and down looking important. After it he would join the three company officials at cards, for it was understood that the *gente* would spend Saturday evening in their quarters, and not try to know too much about what went on in the labor barracks. On Sunday morning they would treat a fresh crop of machete wounds with iodine and stitches; but to know how they had been acquired could create only an awkward embarrassment.

SHEP watched Ted's morose face, and decided to make a diversion.

"*Oiga mi, Coronel!*" he called to Teniente Agrada. "*Mi compadre necessita audar.*"

The policeman strolled over and saluted stiffly.

"The men grow in numbers, Gerente. Soon I will need an assistant. A private only, of course."

"No, you don't," said Shep. "We don't pay any more of you. Any time you can't hold five hundred men, you're slipping."

"Look at Joaquin," Ted suggested. "He's had a few *copas* already. He's fixed for a big night."

He nodded toward a huge Negro who kept pushing his way toward the head of the line, fingering the hilt of the machete strapped to his thick waist. The toes on his feet were wide apart, almost prehensile, and his trousers fitted him like tights. Agrada felt pleased with the chance to show authority, and ordered him back into place.

"Who says so?" asked Joaquin, with the courage inspired by the last shot of Chinese rum. "If my mother had borne you, she would have thought it was a mis-carriage."

The pay-line laughed because it is always good to discomfit someone in uniform; but the policeman prepared to defend the honor and majesty of Panama, combined in his own person. He dropped his hand meaningly on the butt of his revolver.

"Do not dare to take another step forward," he said.

"Don't you dare to come any closer to me," answered Joaquin; and the men behind him, eager for a fight, pushed him out of the line.

Ted laughed, but Shep took his feet down from the crossbar and sat forward, waiting. If it had been any cooler, he might have got up to interfere. The policeman folded his arms, and took another stride.

Then it happened: The machete flashed out and up in a movement as smooth and continuous as a boa striking. Where the policeman's head had been, two red fountains surged up in the bright sun. They leaped and curved and fell; and the body of Teniente Agrada, arms still folded, slumped like an empty sack.

Shep and Ted drew their guns and jumped off the porch in one movement; but Joaquin stood quite still, and his face showed nothing but bewilderment. Ted took the machete out of his unresisting hand, and the men brought ropes and tied him.

"You don't shoot me?" he asked.

"That's not our business," said Shep. "We have to take you to Panama. Be good, and come along."

They left his feet untied until they got him down to the dock and on to the *Inepequiña*. When they came back, they directed the men to bring canvas and wrap the body. Mr. Johnson had collapsed in a chair on the porch, looking gray-green. Shep took Agrada's thirty-eight out of the holster and rolled the cylinder.

"I thought so," he said, disgusted. "Not even loaded! They let themselves run out of ammunition half the time. It sure don't pay to bluff."

"I could have shot that man," said Ted. "I had plenty of time."

"Forget it. We can't put the Teniente's head back on, so what's the use to worry? Here, Jesus, Tomás, Marco, Juan—you've been paid; quit standing around. Bring water. Wash this place up. Mr. Johnson, finish the pay-roll. We want to get out of here before dark."

BY the time the sun lay red on the rim of the water, the *Inepequiña* pulled away from the palm-fringed shore. She had only about fifteen minutes of light in which to make the difficult passage across the coral reefs into the open sea. The smell of Diesel oil forced Ted from his comfortable seat on a hatch; and he leaned on the rail, watching the Jamaican captain in a stylish white yachting-cap

and bare feet, and the lookout who hung incredibly far over the bow.

"Pick up that reef!" sang the Captain.

"A-right! A-right!" intoned the lookout, bored.

"No a-right! You pick him up."

"A-right! A-right! A little to port."

The Captain put the wheel to starboard and muttered: "I don't like port."

"Port now. *Port!*"

"I know what I'm doin'," replied the Captain with haughty calm.

Shep came out of the only cabin, and leaned beside Ted on the rail. He grunted as he raised his foot to the lower bar. Ted nodded toward Joaquin, who lay just in front of the hatch, trussed from head to foot.

"What will become of him?"

"We'll have him back in six months. They have no capital punishment in Panama, and we are practically a convict colony anyway. If he escapes over the border, that's Colombia's hard luck."

"It all makes no sense," objected Ted.

Shep flicked a cigarette-butt over the rail, and it fell like a tiny shooting-star into the quiet water.

"That's Lesson Number One, fella."

NIGHT fell with deceptive calm; the great golden stars hung low on the smokestack, and ribbons of phosphorescent light streamed back from the bow. The heavens lay at peace on the sea.

"Death ought to be important," Ted said.

"Why?" asked Shep; then, as the cook passed in the full glory of a chef's hat: "You, Charley, what's for dinner?"

"Po'k chops," grinned the cook, and vanished into the galley....

And now they were outside the barrier. The launch entered the open sea, and stuck her sharp nose into the long Caribbean swell. She creaked as she rolled her way out of the deep hollows; a crash of pans came out of the galley, and they could hear the cook cursing. The staccato bark of the exhausts mingled with the smash of the waves against the bow, and smeared the heavy trade-winds with a stench of fuel oil. At Ted's feet the Negro was pitiably and desperately seasick. In the swinging light of the small lantern his eyes rolled whitely.

"I'm going to loosen you up, man," said Shep. "You be good now. Remember."

He untied the ropes. The Negro crept across the narrow deck and collapsed with a sigh in a more comfortable position, pillowing his head on the canvas-

wrapped body of his victim. Ted got up and rolled aft. Above him a thin black veil of smoke from the busy little engines blew and shifted across the calm indifferent stars. Shep came and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Cheer up. We've both got our heads, and forty-eight hours from now we'll be as tight as minks. There's no past and no future, and the present aint so bad."

"I'm just trying to figure it out," Ted answered.

"I know," said Shep. "Twenty years ago, I was twenty-five myself."

CHAPTER TWO

IN a blaze of sunlight the *Inepequiña* rounded the breakwater and came into the harbor at Colón. The clean town shown whitely. All seaports have magic unreality, as seen from the water; for dirt and defects are invisible; the little houses, the ordered streets, are like a child's panorama and the diminutive people too remote to have human failings.

The unloading-crew were waiting on the company dock; the bananas began to move smoothly out of the hold and into the rattling conveyors. Ted and Shep delivered their prisoner to the police, and went to make their report to the Division Office.

It stands on a broad well-swept street in the American city. Behind great windows of sparkling glass, the outer room welcomes the cruise passengers. Brilliant posters entice them on to incredible marvels; soft Chinese rugs remind them that not an iota of comfort need be sacrificed.

"Every passenger a pest," muttered Ted, striding quickly through the luxurious gayety with a production-man's contempt for the orchidaceous branch of the business.

In the big room behind, where many typewriters were clattering their nervous rhythm, Shep gave his name and asked for Hargreaves, their immediate superior. Ted waited, his big hat cocked, glad that he had had the ship's cook shine his boots. Some of these office girls weren't so bad! In a moment the receptionist came back, looking impressed. The big boss, Mr. Dillon himself, wanted them.

Mr. Dillon had the corner room, with a view of blue water, and Venetian blinds to admit the trade-winds and exclude the glare. The row of push-buttons on his desk all operated perfectly. The attrac-

tive secretary had just the right blend of deference and efficiency.

Mr. Dillon himself never wore a white linen suit more than once. Even his glasses had an antiseptic gleam. He had an amazing head for figures, and could quote the profits and losses in any of his departments for years back. It was his fancy to be considered a virile personality, and his fetish to keep it. He had determined not to let the tropics soften him, and he talked of "getting up a good sweat," as other men might talk of a religious duty, daily performed.

He waved the men into chairs with extreme cordiality, offered them the best in cigars, and listened understandingly to their report. Ted felt his raw nerves affronted by the efficiency of the office, the business-like precision, the perfection of the boss himself. What had this sort of life to do with Riobar—by what right did this entirely alien civilization assume authority there?

"I'll fix this killing with the Government," said Mr. Dillon, "and you can convey our sympathy to the widow, in a very practical manner."

"Leave it to me," said Shep. "Mighty few tears around here that pesos won't dry."

Mr. Dillon dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand and got down to what he called "brass tacks."

"If you had not been coming up today, I would have sent for you. How would you like not to go back to Riobar for a month or two?"

"Or ever," said Ted. Shep gave him a warning look, but Mr. Dillon went on:

"There is a job I want you to do for me in the Republic of Parador. Horton and Clark can relieve you at the plantation."

"Anything suits me, so long as it is different," Ted answered.

MR. DILLON looked at him shrewdly. He had seen many youngsters go through what he called the "weathering process," and this one was handicapped by more than the average intelligence and imagination. After all, these were good qualities when properly harnessed, and just what he needed for the work in Parador, coupled with a good knowledge of Spanish, which Ted also possessed. And Reeves would be a good balance-wheel. Mr. Dillon came to a decision, quickly, as usual.

"We won't talk about it today. You've some leave coming, and you ought to be



Untied, the Negro collapsed with a sigh, pillowing his head on the body of his victim.

free to enjoy it. Have dinner with me on Thursday, and we'll go into it then. I don't want to see you in the meantime. Or hear of you, either!" (Mr. Dillon gave them a wink.) "Anything I said about Parador is confidential, of course."

Outside the office, Ted and Shep stood for a moment in the brilliant sun. Shep patted the roll of crisp new bills in his pocket, the carefully calculated value of a husband.

"I'm off to see the Señora Agrada."

"I want a bath," said Ted.

They arranged to meet for dinner at the Strangers Club. "Early," Shep insisted. "I'm set for a running start."

Later, in his luxurious bathroom at the George Washington Hotel, Ted stood under a steaming shower, reveling in an abundance of soap and hot water. He scrubbed his skin until it was red, but the expected exhilaration did not come, and feeling inordinately tired, he lay down naked on the bed. . . .

For the first time, he encountered the disquieting thought that his ideas might need revision.

"I don't want to be like Shep," he said to himself; "and not like Mr. Dillon. I'm just drifting—that's what's the matter; and I've got to get hold of things. Stop this drifting along—"

The trade-winds rattled the blinds, but the young man did not move. Ted was asleep. When he woke up, he felt terrible. "Jumping Jehosaphat!" he said. "I've got my hangover in advance."

He had just time to dress in a hurry, and rush to his date with Shep—whom he found on the upstairs veranda of the Strangers Club, dressed in a white suit, a stiff white collar, a pink silk shirt, and a pale green tie. On his feet were white socks and patent-leather dancing pumps. In what he considered formal dress, Shep reserved the right to follow inclination rather than convention. He waved his glass broadly as Ted appeared. It was obvious that he had his running start.

FOOD at the Strangers Club is well cooked, although the soup has been cooled by the trade-wind, and the ice-cream melted by the heat so that everything is of a uniform tepidity. To Shep it was the height of luxury and sophistication. The room gradually filled up; a few Army scouts and flyers came over to speak to them; but most of the people were unfamiliar. Ted knew none of the girls to dance with, except one or two little Texas army wives.

"I tell you," said Shep, "you've got America right here. Clean, that's what America is. Wipe out mosquitoes, dig canals; everywhere America goes there's progress."

"When were you home last?" somebody asked.

Shep glowered at the speaker. "Don't have to go home. Got America right here. Finest country in the world."

Ted watched him with a detachment which several hasty drinks did almost nothing to relieve. A panorama of the evening unrolled itself before him with unpleasant clarity. He would accompany Shep through the inevitable transitions from joy to sorrow, to fighting, to quiescence, in a round of visits to the same familiar spots. For ten cents he would have gone to the hotel to bed. But he could not do that; a man had to enjoy his leave. He was glad when they left the club and hit the Avenida Central, where the banana cowboys and oil-drillers hang out. Midnight found them at Mamie Kelley's—the happyland of sailors and tourists, noisy as Broadway, startling as Havana, gay as Paris. Ted began to feel that if he shook his ballooning head, it would burst into a shower of sparks.

Shep laid a hand on his and looked confidently into his face. "Did I ever

show you the picture of my little girl?" He opened the back of the old-fashioned watch he always carried, and laid it proudly on the table.

"There she is. That's my Bruce Ida. Isn't she a beautiful girl?"

"You bet."

There were four or five in their party by now, and Shep addressed them all, in a confidential whisper.

"Let me tell you something: I haven't seen my little girl since she was three. No, not since she was three years old."

The girl's face smiled up brightly from the table, innocent, imperious. It was possible to imagine a likeness to Shep in the large dark eyes.

"She was born while I was in France. When I came home, my wife's folks wanted me to go into the store. Imagine me, fresh from a machine-gun, weighing out beans and measuring calico. That wouldn't do for me, would it? You tell me, now, would it?"

"Sure it wouldn't, Shep."

"I got out and came down here. I was pretty young in those days. Pretty young." He stared at the picture and shook his head sadly. "My poor little girl! Her mother's dead. I haven't seen her since she was three."

"LISTEN to this, Shep," Ted suggested; "this is going to be good."

A girl in a white glistening dress came out and sang in a husky voice. When she had finished, she disappeared, amid applause no more than polite. In the spotlight which covered her exit appeared an enormous cockroach four inches long. The crowd, ready to be amused, cheered and clapped. The spot followed the roach as he scuttled across the floor, and the crowd roared and stamped. The girl returned, bowed, put her hand on her heart. Through her crude make-up a look of real happiness, not unmixed with astonishment, shone in her face. She had never had such a marvelous success!

Shep banged on the table with his fist and looked truculently from one face to another.

"I'm going back next year, I tell you. Who says I won't go back next year?"

"Nobody says that, Shep. I bet you will go. . . . Let's pick up an entertainer and move on."

"Now you know these girls are locked up until nine A.M."

"Let's get out. Let's go see Josie."

"All right. All right. But I'm going home next year."

ANYTHING MIGHT HAPPEN

Ted got up, and took a step—and much to his surprise fell down.

"My legs," he muttered, apologetically.

It went black after that, and then Shep was bending over him, taking his tie off.

"Hell, no," said Shep to someone behind him. "The man has fever."

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN Ted swam up again out of darkness, he was looking at a white ceiling across which light played like ripples on water. Below the ceiling he saw an air-space, and four incomplete partitions which made a small room, rather dark. He lay in a bed with a sheet over him. He felt very light, as though he might float up off the bed and touch the ceiling—light, comfortable, and clear.

("I won't ask where I am," he thought, "because that sounds foolish.") "Where am I?" he said aloud.

Starched linen rustled faintly near by.

"You are in the Good Shepherd Hospital." A cool experienced hand slipped under his head, and held a glass to his lips. Ted tasted it, and made a face.

"Quinine again! Damn malaria! I'm going to get out of here."

"Not yet, you aren't."

"I've got to get out by Thursday."

"Thursday's over."

Ted tried to sit up, and found it surprisingly difficult.

"Just relax," said the nurse. "You've come as close to blackwater fever as you ever want to get. You'll be here another two weeks."

"You sound stern."

"I'm just a nurse. It's not my business to baby adults." She went out, shutting the half door.

Ted lay for a while thinking things over, idly listening to the constant bustle in the corridor, to the sounds of other patients. At last he rang the bell. The nurse came back, and this time he had a look at her. He had been right about it. She was certainly handsome. Her heavy yellow hair coiled in a thick bun on her neck; her waist was trim. Ted could not see her ankles. Her eyes were enormous, gray and wide apart, but they were too direct and penetrating; they looked as if they saw too much.

"What is your name?" he asked, smiling as agreeably as possible.

"Martha Evans. Did you want something?"

"I hope my office knows where I am."

"A Mr. Reeves was here, and said for you not to worry. He has taken care of everything. He will be back from the farm in time to see Mr. Dillon with you. He said you would understand."

"Good old Shep!"

Martha Evans said nothing, only looked at him with those bright gray eyes, and Ted felt a need for affirmation.

"Shep is one of the best. You ought to know him."

"I do know him. I nursed him through D.T.'s last year."

"It's a wonder he didn't tell me about you."

"Can I get you anything?"

"You could be a little more friendly."

Martha Evans gave Ted a look which said very plainly that she had heard that one before, and departed.

When she came back, it was with the supper-tray, and Ted felt glad that his genuine weakness made it necessary for her to feed him. Her hands, slightly reddened by washing with disinfectant, were well shaped, competent and impersonal.

"How does it happen I've never met you before?" asked Ted.

"We don't spend our nights in the same places, Mr. Phillips."

Ted refused to be discouraged. "How did you get here, anyway?"

THIS time Martha did smile—a real smile which brought out two dimples, and Ted saw that he had not been mistaken about her—she was beautiful.

"When you're one of five sisters in a Maine village, and you're not the prettiest or the brightest, you have to get out if you want to get married. I heard there were lots of men in the tropics."

Ted whistled. "You're frank, anyway."

"Oh, but that was three years ago," said Martha Evans. "I've seen them all by now. I've seen the ones who've just come down, and the ones who can't go back. If I ever marry one of these tropical tramps, I hope they put me in a mental hospital. My ambition now is to be head nurse here; and I think I'll get it, too."

Her eyes were laughing at him, and Ted felt astonishingly nettled.

"It's nice to know what you want," he said. "I'm not sure that I do."

"Men never do," answered Martha.

"And women?"

"Almost always; but that doesn't mean that they can get it."

Ted could see possibilities in this line of talk; but before he had time to de-

velop it, an uproar started outside. Two or three men with powerful voices were shouting at the top of their lungs; many feet ran down the corridor; there was a crash, not too remote, as though a tableful of bottles had been overturned.

"Excuse me," said Martha. "I think the Murphy boys are bringing their old man in for his annual drunk."

She ran out, and Ted lay listening to the sounds of scuffling, panting, the voices growing more muffled; finally a distant door slammed, and then silence. It seemed strange to have such a good fight going on and not be able to get into it. He was chagrined when only the Indian orderly came to take away his tray, and said that Miss Evans had gone off duty.

DURING the long days of his slow recovery, Ted found himself taking great interest in Martha. She had four patients on the floor in addition to himself, and he strove for the privilege of going out on the veranda in a wheelchair, so that he could identify some of the peculiar sounds which floated in over his partitions.

There was an individual with close-cropped gray hair and a rough-hewn face, who smoked long black cigars and turned out to be a female missionary to the San Bu Indians. There was a small boy, known only as Chico, whose father had cut him badly with a machete. (It had been a mistake, of course—the blow had been meant for his mother.) There was old man Murphy, who, sweated out, became a thoroughly genial red-faced Irishman. And there was Don Miguel Ferrara, a grandee of Parador.

The relatives of the Don occupied the other rooms on the floor. To him belonged the three children who roller-skated in the corridor; to him belonged the fat women who sat placidly all day embroidering and occasionally shrieking at the children; to him belonged the three young men, with straw hats already dyed black in preparation for the expected funeral. These were distant relatives, for Don Miguel had no children, and to some lucky nephew or cousin all his estates would devise. Obviously, Uncle would not die neglected.

He lay in the midst of them, propped on his pillows with his eyes closed, looking rather like an old eagle carved in ivory, allowing the family life to boil and surge around him as though it were something which could not possibly require his attention.

"Every day," Martha explained, "some of them tell me with tears in their eyes, how sad it is that Don Miguel had no children—no legitimate children, they hasten to add. It is nerve-racking for them, because they can't decide which one he favors."

"Is he so rich?"

"Half of Parador, they say."

"Parador?"

"Yes. The place you talked so much about when you were delirious—or perhaps I shouldn't remind you."

"I suppose he won't last long."

"No? The best part is that thanks to insulin, he is going to fool them and get well. I haven't had the heart to tell them yet."

"The lady missionary seems to have plenty of life."

"On the contrary, she is dying. She will never finish that school."

"You are as hard-boiled as Shep."

"No," said Martha, "there's a difference . . . You've sat up long enough. I'm going to take you in." She turned to the little boy who lay in the bed next to Ted with a turban of bandages over a paper-white face. "Chico, when I have put this big boy to bed because he is bad, I'll come back and tell you a story."

Ted felt inexplicably cross as he watched her measure out his quinine. "I believe you like giving me that stuff."

"I do," answered Martha, with a savage gleam in her eye. "It's better for you than that bunch of army flyers and whisky-bottles I threw out of your room last night."

"You're a sadist at heart—I'll be glad to get out of your clutches."

Martha Evans laughed at that, as she went out on the veranda and threw back at him one last mocking look from her brilliant gray eyes.

"This would be a fine time," thought Ted sarcastically, "for me to get tangled up with a girl; with this business in Parador coming on, I can't lose my head because she is the first one of my own kind I've seen in two years. I wonder how much I spilled about Parador, anyway."

CHAPTER FOUR

ALL good illnesses come to an end, and a week later Ted and Shep sat at dinner in the high, cool apartment of Mr. Dillon.

Mr. Dillon was a widower with three children. The son was at an American

university, "not a great student, but a wonderful fellow for getting things done—active in half a dozen organizations." The younger girl still went to boarding-school, and the elder had married, "the son of one of my fraternity brothers." Their pictures stood on the piano in the living-room, bright, smiling, healthy, impossibly sane. Mr. Dillon got just the right shade of regret into his voice when he spoke of them: "Too far away from



"It's nice to know what you want," Ted said. "I'm not sure that I do." "Men never do," answered Martha.

me, but of course I couldn't have them growing up down here."

Actually his life, which ran like clock-work, suited him very well. His two Martinique servants had been trained by the late Mrs. Dillon, a passionate housekeeper; and the ornate silver on the heavy mahogany sideboard still shone with the luster on which she had insisted. It had been her custom to keep a daily record of her menus, using a fresh black leather notebook every year. The servants had one of them which they had followed for the five years since her death. Since this date was May 15th, they had crabmeat cocktail, a casserole of chicken, and a salad of avocado pears. Mrs. Dillon had not cared for eating rich desserts in the tropics.

During dinner Mr. Dillon kept the conversation on general topics—the price of bananas, the danger of a blowdown. It was not until they sat over coffee on his wide screened veranda that he came to the subject in hand. All the rooms in his apartment opened on this porch, and could be seen as they sat there, brightly lighted and empty, giving no shelter to eavesdroppers. Chairs squeaked softly on the grass rug laid over the tiles; the wind-harps in the doorways tinkled incessantly; the leaves of the orchids growing in hanging pots on the pillars moved gently. Mr. Dillon lowered his voice:

"I must impress on you, before I say anything more, that this is a risky business. Parador is not Panama. It has no Zone, where things are kept in order. They tell me there have been forty revolutions in forty years. Things happen there quickly; and no matter what happens on this trip, your company, and even your consul, will not back you up in the least. In fact, we will disclaim you. . . . Do I make myself clear?"

Ted leaned forward in his chair, and the cigarette in his hand burned itself

out, forgotten. Here at last was adventure, the life for which he had come to the tropics, for which he had hoped since he first began to study Spanish with a set of phonograph records! Shep, however, continued to lie back inertly, his eyes half closed, his expression dreamy.

"O.K. so far," he said.

MR. DILLON resumed: "In the seaport of Maladon an independent banana company has appeared. They seem to have no plantations, but to work by organizing the native farmers; and they ship a large number, I may say an alarming number, of stems every week."

Ted sat back, disappointed. It was only bananas, after all! He had hoped for something more exciting than bananas. Although he tried to remind himself that the banana was vital to Amalgamated Fruit, vital to his job and his livelihood, even vital to the millions who ate it, he found it hard to feel genuinely alarmed by any number of stems. Dillon's next sentence, however, revived his interest.

"I come now to the really confidential part of my story. We have reason to believe that a European power is backing this banana company, and using it to screen considerable operations. You know our State Department is very conscious of South America at present, and although our Latin cousins may not love us very much, we certainly don't want them transferring their affections to anyone else. . . . I may say that Washington will be waiting for your report with a great deal of interest."

Mr. Dillon allowed a weighty pause to follow this statement, but Shep spoiled the dramatic effect with a question.

"So where do we come in?"

"You will investigate the situation, and perhaps buy up some land—but not as representatives of this company. I understand, Phillips, that you made a hobby of collecting insects while you were in Riobar. From now on, you will be an entomologist, more interested in bugs than in bananas. You will not even use your own names. The Paradorian minister in Panama City is tailoring some passports for you, and expects a visit from Phillips in the morning. I have a code which will permit you to communicate with me in entomological terms. There is a boat from the Pacific side, day after tomorrow. Will you take it?"

"Sure," said Shep. "But where are we supposed to be all this time?"

"Reeves and Phillips will return to the Panamanian bush and make some explorations of the interior. Brown and Thorn-dyke, naturalists, will take the *Ucayali*."

In a short while everything had been arranged, and Ted and Shep found themselves standing in the street outside, with their future suddenly made over, and the best hours of the evening still to be provided for.

"Let's have a drink," said Shep.

"You go along. There's somebody I want to see."

Shep cocked an eye at him. "Evans sure is a beautiful girl. Many a man has slipped on the ice before now."

"You seem to know a lot about it."

"Trial and error, pal. Trial and error."

Ted had not planned to take Shep with him, but he soon saw that he was going to. At the hospital he sent up his name with more assurance than he felt, and was considerably relieved when Martha herself followed the messenger into the lobby of the nurses' home. He had never seen her out of uniform before; and in a green dress, with her hair brushed into loose curls, she struck him speechless. Consequently conversation was taken over by the irrepressible Shep.

"I can't go out tonight," said Martha. "I'm on duty in half an hour. Tomorrow is my day off."

"Have dinner with me?" Shep asked.

Momentarily Martha's eyes met Ted's.

"I have to be in Panama City," he muttered.

Martha accepted Shep's invitation smoothly.

"If I can get back in time, I'll join you," said Ted.

"Never mind," Shep encouraged him. "We'll be all right."

"Don't let him drink too much," Ted advised with malice.

Martha looked from one to the other, and smiled almost too sweetly. "I never worry about that with you bush men."

A few more polite phrases, and she was gone. Shep pulled the collar of his white coat up around his ears and gave an elaborate pantomime of freezing to death, at which no one laughed except the mozo who acted as telephone-operator and door-boy.

WHEN dinner-time came the next night, however, Ted found himself too absorbed to worry much about possible situations in Colón.

The Legation of Parador in the city of Panama is a house of pink stucco with its

green blinds closed across the front as though it would give nothing of itself to the world. The delicate iron balconies along the second story are for show and not for use. In the stucco beside the great mahogany door are three scars, unrepaired, made by the bullets of Panamanian revolution. But the life of the house, withdrawn from disagreeable reality, centers around the secluded patio.

IN the patio Ted and the minister sat at dinner. The floor was tiled with black and white marble, and a little bronze boy poured endless water from a shell into a pool ringed with heliotrope. Heavy bougainvillea vines grew up to the balconies on four sides, and made a green flower-studded wall before mysterious doors. Two cages of parrakeets hung from supports on the pillars, and swung in the breeze which made the shaded table candles flicker. On the high back of the minister's chair perched an old macaw, watching everything with glittering attentive eyes, and occasionally emitting a harsh cry like an irascible skeptical comment on the conversation.

The minister was not a man whom one could meet and forget. In his person the pride of two races mingled. His square powerful figure and broad impassive face was Indian; but out of the middle of it jutted a high Spanish nose, and his fine waving hair, streaked with white, showed European blood. A *conquistador* had married an Indian princess, and their descendant had lost nothing of their spirit.

He had taken Ted's measure, and decided that he would do, and now sat talking easily in a melodious and fluent English. Listening, Ted felt that a door was being opened into a new world, in some ways strange and terrible, but infinitely interesting, a harsh and passionate land of vivid contrasts.

The minister described his country. There was the steaming luxuriant coast, and the bare dry uplands, and the chain of living volcanoes like fortresses of the gods across the bosom of the land. In the hidden thickets of the jungle flitted shadowy Indians who had never been tamed, not by the Incas, nor by the Spaniards—Indians who still could and did shrink human heads to the size of an orange without altering the expressions.

"In Parador," said Señor Miranda, "anything may happen. Under the surface of the land there is unrest, and the red rocks still run molten. In my people

there is unrest also. We have been free of Spain little more than one hundred years. We have much to learn. My father—I do not say it to boast; it is history—was the most liberal president my country ever had. It was he who built the railway, he who separated church and state. The present government is well-meaning but weak—and weak governments are dangerous in Parador. A struggle for power is coming; I can smell it as I can smell the heliotrope in the mountains.

"You will wonder, perhaps, why I, a diplomat of respectability, am forging for you passports. Well, I will tell you: In my country there is a man, very rich, very powerful; when this struggle comes, it is my idea that he will be at the head of it. His name is Ferrara.

"I will tell you something else: I have some memories which you in America del Norte may not understand. When I was a boy—ten years old, it might be—I stood on the balcony of a house in our capital city of Bolto, and looked down into the principal square. Around the square a team of oxen drew a cart. To the tail of the cart was tied the body of a man. He was dead. He had been shot. They dragged him all that day, until his feet were worn off on the stones, and only the stumps of his legs were left. I knew him, señor. He was my father.

"The paving of that square in Bolto is sacred to me, for in it I tread upon my father's flesh. The man of whom I speak gave that order; but he does not know that I know that."

SILENCE fell in the patio. One of the candles guttered out. Ted sat in a dark dream. He tried to summon up a racial memory of Indian massacres, of a time in his own country when blood paid for blood, but it seemed remote and unreal. The United States that he knew was the United States of paved streets and arc lights, corner drugstores and policemen who might not always stand for law, but came out heavily for order. In Parador, he reminded himself, the Indian, ravaged, conquered, betrayed, lived on in the blood of the people themselves, and took an inexorable vengeance.

The minister broke the silence. "It is past. We will not dwell on it. But if Ferrara makes plans, I will make them too. If he has friends, I will also have them. I want to be friends with your company and, Señor Phillips, with you."

"You can count on that," said Ted, and shook hands solemnly. He went back

to his hotel in a state of exaltation, like a knight sworn to a crusade. It was not until he was undressing in the unromantic glare of a bald electric light bulb hanging from the ceiling, that he reflected that he had pledged himself to something without knowing very much about it. In the reaction of that moment, he took down the telephone and dictated a telegram to Martha, regretting that he would not see her before he went back to the bush.

Shep, to whom he eagerly told his story the next morning, proved more disillusioning than the electric-light bulb.

"It won't be the first revolution our people have had a finger in."

"Why—what business is it of ours?"

"Don't be dumb, sonny. If you help a government get in or stay in, it's going to give you some concessions, aint it?"

"Everything comes down to profit in the end," said Ted bitterly.

"Sure. Profit and self-preservation, and a bit of fluff on the side. That Evans is a remarkable girl."

"I hope you had a nice evening."

"She said to give her love to Parador."

"Good God! You didn't tell her?"

"You talked when you were delirious, and when I mentioned the place over the second bottle, she added it up."

"It will be terrible if she talks."

"No judge of women, are you? She's as safe as a vault."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE short, squat *Ucayali* thumped her way down Panama Bay, past the long line of American battle-wagons, and turned her weary battered nose into the Pacific's swell. The blistering tropical sun scaled more paint from her canvas-covered boat-deck, and her unscoured brass-work was hot to the touch. The green waters stretched as smoothly as a thin silk veil pulled tight, or crumpled by an occasional breeze into a crêpe.

Occasionally a twelve-hundred-pound manta broke out of the oily sea, and fell back with a report like a cannon-shot. The little flying fish rippled the surface thinly as they splashed in the wake of the ship.

Ted spun a half-smoked cigarette over the rail.

"I feel as though I were going to sail a thousand miles," he remarked.

"No, *hombre*," answered Shep. "But you are going back a century."

Ted looked at him in surprise.

"I didn't know you had that much poetry in your make-up."

Shep snorted. "Where's the poetry in a simple statement of fact?"

They stopped at Buenaventura, where it rains three hundred and thirty inches in a year, and at Tumace, and at Jipijapa, and at Esmeralda, where the gulls and pelicans wheel over the thatched huts, and ancient giants have left their mysterious stone chairs on the mountains. After two days of dreamlike steaming, they swung into the wide mouth of the Amayas River, mighty as the Mississippi, fed by a hundred Andean streams; still, in spite of the railway, the chief road of a nation. For seventy miles the *Ucayali* churned her way through yellow waters, until at last her engines stopped, and her anchor slipped into the mud before the port of Maladon.

LEANING over the rail, Ted saw a prospect which enchanted him—a city of domes and spires like an Oriental legend rising suddenly out of the water in shades of pink and blue and white, a wide palm-fringed street running along the waterfront. It was dreamlike, incredibly Moorish. He waited impatiently for the bouncing little lighter which came alongside to finish its slow maneuvers and bring the passengers and freight ashore.

They climbed onto the wharf and were assaulted by a chattering crowd, raucous touts screaming the virtues of different hotels, Indians and cholos, halfbreeds, in brilliant ponchos and gaudy calico skirts, with baskets and trays of golden fruit, papayas, oranges, monster pineapples big as babies. Ted would have lingered, investigated, possibly have lost a suitcase; but Shep at this point devoted himself strictly to business, with the result that they were soon on their way, in a leaping car of ancient vintage, but with purple velvet cushions, to the Gran Hotel Ritz.

"For me," Shep announced, "the best is not good enough. Not good enough for this big bug-man. The diplomatic suite, *dos cuartos*, bath, and a bucket of ice."

The hotel clerk agreed with too much delight, and Ted and Shep found themselves installed in rather gloomy grandeur. The rooms were patterned after a third-rate French hotel, with great gilt-framed pier-glasses between windows, looped curtains of grimy Nottingham lace, and in the middle of the living-room

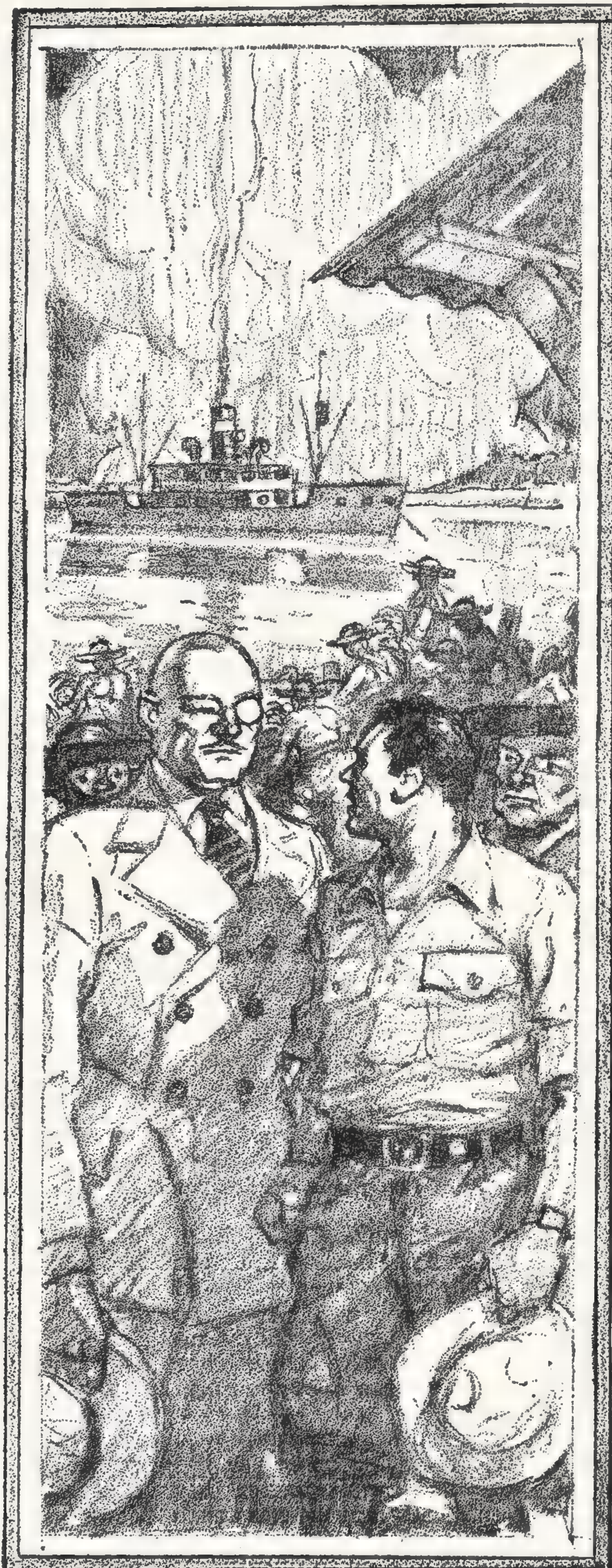
"The gentlemen are interested in bananas?" inquired in deep voice.

the *pièce de résistance*, a white-enameled bathtub! The manager himself took pleasure in showing how freely flowed the cold water, how warmly trickled the hot, and how when the bath was done, one had but to remove a rubber plug, and behold, the whole flowed out like magic into pipes concealed, would one believe it, under the floor.

Shep, who had not approved of the bathing facilities on the *Ucayali*, made ready to enjoy this luxury at once, in spite of the protests of Ted, who was all for seeing the town. Shep chased the largest of the cockroaches out of the tub, started the water, and got in. Unfortunately, however, there seemed to be trouble with the plumbing of the Gran Hotel Ritz. The trickle of tepid water ceased, but not until after Shep, an expansive type of bather, had pretty well covered himself with a heavy lather. His indignant shouts brought Ted from the next room.

"For Pete's sake get me out of here! Call that manager! Get some action."

The manager promptly appeared in person, waving his beautiful little hands and dancing apologetically on his pointed feet. The fault did not lie with him, he assured the señores, but with the city management, who collected exorbitant taxes for new pipes, and then failed to put them in, using the money instead for a trip to Paris. There they were at the moment, while he, the manager of Maladon's finest hotel, was humiliated before his distinguished guests. But wait, he had an idea!



A few minutes later, before all the soap was quite dry, there came a timid knock at the door, and a small Indian girl brought in a crock of water. Shep was hardened to receiving in his tub by now, but the situation seemed to burst upon the girl rather suddenly. She took one terrified look at his huge soapy figure, practically flung the water at him, and fled. Shep let out a roar, partly of rage, and partly because the water was cold.

Ted, who had rolled on the sofa howling with laughter and shouting for a camera, got up and put on his broad hat.

"I'm going downstairs, pal. If that Indian girl comes back, it's because she loves you. You'll find me in the bar."

By the time Shep came down, Ted had finished his glass of iced *chicha*, the national drink, a procedure which Shep viewed with alarm, for he had a deep distrust of native beverages. The dry afternoon wind, the *chanduy*, was beginning to blow away the heat by the time they went out, and the town was waking up for its brief evening.

IT did not take much of a ramble around the city to discover that Maladon put its best foot forward at the water-front. That was indeed a noble street, with its palms and arc-lights and tramway, recently electrified, and the pink and white and blue houses above the shady arcade which covered the sidewalk. But behind this street lay the poorer quarter; the noises and the smells quickly drove Ted and Shep back to the water-front.

They stopped by a dock where peons, stripped to the waist, were loading enormous stems of green bananas on to a barge. The temptation to take at least one unconcerned look proved irresistible.

"Boy, what fruit!" exclaimed Ted. "Those monkeys ought to be shot for handling it like coal."

"Shut up, you dope!" growled Shep. "You never saw a banana before in your life. You're a big bug-man now, and don't you forget it."

"The gentlemen are interested in bananas?" inquired a deep voice behind them.

They turned, and saw a very tall man in a starched linen suit, wearing his hair closely cropped, and a monocle in one gray eye. Their first impression was of the largest and cleanest person they had ever seen. Their next thought was to wonder how such a big man had managed to come up to them so silently.

"No," lied Ted. "My friend and I are entomologists."

"So?"

"We've heard that often interesting spiders could be found in bunches of bananas. Are these yours?"

"Yes. That they are. From up the river. It is a pity your American companies keep so low the price. For my little enterprise I get hardly nothing."

Ted smiled apologetically. "I'm afraid I don't know very much about that."

"No?"

"Are you German?"

"That speaks for itself, I expect. My English for a long time now I use very little. But a year once I spent at your Harvard University. Are you long staying in Parador?"

"We have no plans. Later we expect to go into the jungle, of course."

"I envy you. Let me to help you if I can; here is my card. In all what science concerns, I have the greatest interest."

He gave them his card with a stiff little bow, and went away. Shep noticed then that the soles of his white shoes were rubber, and that his movements were as quiet as a cat's.

"Three hundred pounds of silence," muttered Ted; "a funny type to be in the banana business."

"You're getting brighter all the time," Shep answered. "You can do the talking with that bird. I never went through high-school, and it wouldn't take him long to spot it. You be careful."

Ted read from the card in his hand:

"*'Herr Hugo Reiser, importer and exporter, Hamburg and Maladon.'*"

"So that is what he calls himself!" said Shep.

They noticed that the peons, who had been watching them with a good deal of interest, were now devoting themselves exclusively to their work.

"It's no use to hang around here," said Shep. "That Heinie put the bee on those guys. The movies are a good place to keep out of mischief. Let's have a drink and go. We can't get dinner before eight-thirty or nine, anyway."

AS they strolled off down the broad well-lighted street, a tall Paradorian came out of the warehouse into which Herr Reiser had gone, and stood in the doorway, lighting a long black crooked cigar. When they passed, he stepped down and followed behind them. . . .

El Gran Teatro International proved to be international only in odor. The

smell and the heat, and Shep's constant squirming as the soap melted on his skin, drove them out before the finale of a five-year-old French film. Across the street stood the restaurant, La Fonda, cheerful and well lighted. Ted and Shep went inside and sat down at a table.

Nothing happened; a mouse-faced harried waiter flew back and forth through the swinging door into the kitchen, but never approached them. The coffee-boy went from table to table with his two jugs, pouring coffee from one and milk from the other into every cup but theirs. Shep began to bang with his fist.

"Oje! Psst! How the hell do you get service here?"

THE proprietor himself came at last, all bows and apologies. It gave him great pain to see the señores so neglected! They must excuse. The fault was not his. It was that the Señor Reiser was entertaining in the private room and required all the waiters. But the Señor Reiser had seen the señores come in, and he asked that they would do him the favor to join him.

"Why doesn't he come here?" said Shep in English. "Who the hell does he think he is?"

"I think we had better go," Ted answered. "He takes too much interest in us already. Maybe we can put him off, and find out something ourselves."

Shep followed him, grumbling, into the private room. There were three gentlemen of Parador with Herr Reiser, obviously men of education and intelligence. At first glance there was little to distinguish one of them from another, for all had well-cut features, warm dark eyes, and hands so delicate that they were almost feminine. One of them wore an army uniform; the other two were in white.

Herr Reiser greeted the Americans with a heavy cordiality, made the introductions, and ordered an elaborate dinner for them in spite of their protests and the fact that the others had nearly finished. In a few minutes the Paradorians rose and excused themselves; and although everyone was exaggeratedly polite, Ted got the impression that they had been dismissed.

"Now, gentlemen, we can talk," said Reiser. "I am so interested of your work. What university or museum do you represent?"

Ted decided that his best defense was an innocent ignorance.

"I'm afraid I'm just an independent man with a hobby. I'm not connected with any institution, and Mr. Brown is just a friend, who has come along to help me. If we are successful, I hope to make a contact with the Museum of Natural History in New York, and perhaps to work for them next time."

"Ah, yes. Many friends there I have. You must to know my friend Kopff?"

"My connection with the Museum is still in the future," said Ted modestly. "I don't know anybody. I was selling automobiles in Galena, Illinois, until a little legacy gave me this opportunity."

"Indeed. I did not know much scientific curiosity was, in the Middle West."

"Have you been there? It is so large that it is not easy to generalize about it."

("You won that round, buddy," thought Shep; but Reiser seemed determined to go on with his inquiries.)

"Are you specializing in any insect in your hunting?"

Ted had prepared for that one long ago.

"*Microlepidoptera* and *bupestris* beetles—although I would be interested in anything else which was unusual."

"If you in the Indian country go, you must let me to help you. I have what you call a pull with the Jivaro Indians, what makes the heads. It is nothing, only I live with them once."

"That sounds interesting, but I think we will spend our first month not too far from civilization, to make sure that we are in condition."

"So sensible you are. Well, if I can to help, I shall be glad. Now if the gentlemen cared about bananas, I could show them somethings. I tell you, Parador is a poor country, and the business was begging many years. No one touches it. Then I organize, and these poor people get the profit. But all must to be controlled. Yes—well controlled. In the banana business in Parador, there is no room for two."

BEHIND a thin curtain of politeness Reiser's tone had become definitely dictatorial, but Ted answered him with the utmost blandness.

"I have no objection to learning about the banana business while I am down here, or anything else I can about the country. The great advantage of being an amateur scientist is that one can still follow side-lines with interest; I'd be glad to see a banana farm, and incidentally, I should think it would make a fine breeding ground for *lepidoptera*."



"So it is. To one you shall come with me, and I shall try not to bore you by talking too much what you call shop."

The conversation drifted off into safer and more casual channels. Ted found himself describing Galena, Illinois, where as a matter of fact he had once visited a college roommate, and then giving his first impressions of Panama in phrases he had heard used by the tourists. They parted at last, urbane and cheerful, and Shep was inclined to congratulate Ted on his conduct of the evening.

"I'm not so sure," said Ted gloomily. "Obviously he suspects us. I don't think I gave him any loopholes, but just for that reason he'll have to come at it again. The next move is up to him, and it may not be one that we will enjoy."

CHAPTER SIX

THE entomologists took council and decided to move up-river in the morning to Rio Triqua, an inland port where bananas were concentrated for shipment. There they would be closer to the people, and it would be easier to get information without appearing to look for it.

"I'll be glad to get a fresh start, Mr. Brown," said Ted to Shep.

"You're doing all right, Mr. Thorn-dyke," Shep answered loyally.

At Rio Triqua they established themselves in the solitary and insanitary hotel, and let it be known that they would pay cash for specimens of insect life. They were promptly flooded with every known pest, from iguanas to beetles two inches long with a bright light in their tails. On the day when the tarantulas and the coral snake arrived, the manager asked them to move, in spite of their assurances that everything would go immediately in to one of their cyanide jars. Through the influence of a waiter with whom they had made friends, they took

the house of his dead aunt on the outskirts of the town, an adobe hut with thatched roof and mud floor, matting for beds, and sections of log for chairs. To their disgust, they had to swallow their pride and go back to the hotel for meals.

"I'll cook for you myself when we go into the jungle, Mr. Brown," Ted promised.

"I'll have bugs enough before then, Mr. Thorndyke, or may I call you Upton?" Shep replied ominously.

Each morning they strolled around the muddy streets with the open gutters, and out into the countryside over what passed for roads. Occasionally they drove in a hired car to a point from which they could walk through the banana country. The Indians along the road bowed low when they were driving, but ignored them when they walked. Each afternoon they took a steamy siesta, and bought in the day's batch of specimens.

With the specimens came information, a little at a time, enough by the end of the week to make a picture: In this canton not even the officials were loyal to the Government. The President, a liberal, was thought weak because he did not go in for blood purges; and dangerous because he talked of expropriating estates and giving them to the peons. It was a district of rich landowners, and the richest was one of the Ferrara family. He had so much land that he had never been over it all, and he might sell a few thousand hectares, since he had a particular need for ready cash.

They heard no more directly from Señor Reiser, but everyone here knew him. He was a sort of god to the business men, so *simpatico*, so ready to negotiate at all hours, not like the Nord Americanos, who would turn up at nine in the morning with a contract to be signed. He pleased the poor people by paying in goods instead of cash, and even considered their tastes to the extent of having madonnas and saints printed on the wrappers of the cans.

All this Ted and Shep put into their report, together with a question as to whether they should buy some land, which they had found to be excellent.

"Too many people poke their noses into the mails here," said Shep. "I'll take this down to Maladon and put it on the boat myself."

With Shep away, Ted found the evenings intolerably long. In the daytime he kept himself busy arranging the "specimens" in the flat tin boxes with which

he had been provided, looking them up in his books on the subject, and writing labels which he hoped were correct. Then came the darkness, and the hut was too bare, too lonely. He went out, longing for someone to talk to, and walked up and down the streets. They were dusky, but full of movement and whispers and laughter, and from many of the houses came music, the strange music native to the country, not quite Spanish, not quite Indian, minor, haunting, yet strong—aspiration over melancholy. There was friendship in this little town, and courtship and love and merriment, but none of it was for Ted. He felt as alien as a man from Mars.

In desperation he went into the *cantina* for a nightcap, sat down at one of the dirty little tables and asked for Scotch, although he knew by now that there was none to be had, and that he would end by taking a "*copa*" of rum. The hot night air, thickened with the smell of pineapple, rum and sweat, was almost tangible in the room. There were about a dozen *bañaneros* sitting around in their stained shirts, and one of them had a guitar.

The *bañaneros* laughed and sang, and Ted drank his rum. One glass did not take the edge off his loneliness, and so he ordered another. He had started the fourth when the fight began.

It blew up so suddenly, out of an atmosphere which seemed entirely peaceful, that Ted never knew the cause of it. Suddenly two men stood up and exchanged unfavorable opinions on each other's ancestry; then one hit the other, everyone joined in, a table fell over, the lights went out, and there was shooting. As the flashes of fire stabbed the darkness, Ted took refuge behind his upset table, and drew his thirty-eight out of his shirt. It was purely a reflex action. In his mind was only the wish not to be shot by accident in a fight which he did not even understand.

WHEN the lights went on again, there were several policemen in the room, and Ted crawled out of his corner rather sheepishly, gun still in hand. They asked for it, and he handed it over, laughing. The fight seemed a good joke, now that it was over. Then he looked behind him and saw the dead man on the floor.

The police indicated that they would like to have him come along.

"But *hombres*, take a look at my gun! It hasn't been fired."



"That," said the Teniente, a tall, grim man with a pockmarked face, "will be for the judge to decide."

The survivors of the fight had closed in around them. Ted looked at the ring of swarthy faces. They were interested, but he could not flatter himself that they were sympathetic. In the roadway outside, half the town seemed to have collected. So far as Ted could gather from the babble, they were demanding the arrest of the "*extranjero*." He shrugged, slapped his belt, stuck his thumbs in it, and walked out.

A policeman went ahead, clearing the way. Ted walked between two others; and a fourth followed, presumably holding back the crowd which trailed them, welcoming this unexpected excitement.

The jail at La Triqua had not been constructed by humanitarians. During the night, Ted knew only that it was unbearably hot, and that it stank. He stumbled over a couple of warm bundles which smelled all too human, but which merely grunted. His hand touched a rough wall, and he lowered himself cautiously in the impalpable darkness until the other hand touched an earthen floor. He sat down, stretching out his legs. Something quick ran across his feet, but he could not tell whether it was a lizard, a spider or a rat.

After an interminable time the light began to come through the single high barred window; and with the light, the flies woke up. Then Ted found it impossible to keep still, for they settled like a blanket on any stationary object. His two cell-mates snored on undisturbed, and Ted had plenty of time to watch them. They did not look any better than they smelled. He got up stiffly, and went over to the window for air, but soon dodged back.

The children of Rio Triqua had also risen early, with the matutinal high spirits of the young, and the game in that neighborhood appeared to be pelting the faces which looked out of the jail with the filth which the street furnished abundantly. Ted leaned back against the wall and clenched his teeth with the effort to keep still.

Time wore on; and at last a jailer came in, carrying a bowl filled with a doubtful mixture of rice, oil and beans, which he gave to Ted. He then roused the two fellow-prisoners with well-placed kicks, and hustled them out of the cell—treatment which they accepted without protest. Ted attempted to eat, but the flies got more satisfaction from it than he did. Later in the morning the jailer returned, took away the bowl, and furnished his cell with a comparatively clean pail for the corner of the room.

AS the day passed, Ted wrenched his mind from the discomfort, tried to think ahead, and prepare himself for every possible contingency. He made a firm resolve not to reveal his identity. He need not have bothered. No one except the jailer came near him.

By the third morning Ted's nose had accustomed itself to the smell, and his heroics had given way to dull determination. If he allowed himself to think at all, he became so impatient that he felt feverish. It was best to go through the motions of living like an automaton. He worked out a system of exercise. Three of his rangy strides took him across his cell, and six strides down it. At each corner he would stop and do ten knee-bends and stretches, counting aloud for the pleasure of hearing a voice, and keeping it up until he was weary.

"Seven—eight—nine—ten—step—step—step—one—two—three—four—"

Ted was so absorbed in his counting that he did not hear two sets of footsteps coming instead of one. The key rattled; the door opened; and the broad and burly figure of Shep walked in. He was not in the best of shape. His formerly white linen suit appeared to have been in too frequent contact with a roadway; one trouser-leg was split to the knee, and a sleeve was missing. A beautiful black mouse hung over his left eye, and the knuckles on his right hand were split; but he rolled into the cell with a self-confident swagger, and the beaming expression of a man who has accomplished a difficult but satisfying duty.

Ted yelled and sprang at him, and for a moment they beat each other on the back inarticulately. Then Ted, to cover too great a relief, fell back on the obvious.

"You look fine. What you been doing? Catching lions for the zoo?"

"Well, it's like this: I had to throw a policeman through a window before I could get in here. I was smarter than you, though. I didn't kill my man."

"Neither did I."

"You don't have to tell me. I came back yesterday, and you could float the *Ucayali* on what I've had to drink to get the story. Give me a cigarette."

"I smoked my last one yesterday."

"And those low-lives took mine when they frisked me after the fight."

"We ought not to smoke in here, anyway," said Ted, feeling unaccountably lighthearted. "It's bad for the curtains."

Shep settled himself against the wall and mopped his bruised eye tenderly.

"You're in a terrible spot, bud," he announced. "They'll railroad you to hell and gone, if you don't get out of here."

"But I haven't done anything."

"Who cares? I palled up last night with Manuel, who runs the *cantina*. Boy, does he have lousy rum! I swear, when I think how I'm going to feel, I'm afraid to go to sleep."

"Skip the symptoms, will you! Have you got anything to tell me or not?"

"Keep your shirt on, Upton. We've got time. Time, and nothing else. We can't do a thing until you see the judge."

"But what've they charged me with?"

"Murder."

"That's ridiculous—"

"If you wouldn't keep interrupting me, I could talk. Here you are, a '*sin-verguenza*' foreigner, and you bump off the flower of the town! But about the middle of the night, it comes out that the flower was a bum and a pig-thief; and about the time light breaks over the jungle, we get back where I had a hunch we started."

"Back where?"

"Back to our pal Señor Reiser. Sonny, you've been framed."

TED sat and let this information seep in. It illumined the past, all right; but it shed no light on the future.

"Since I can't get you out," Shep continued, "I figure I'll have to get in."

"I'll have to get out somehow."

"Well, you can't do it this morning. The place is lousy with guards. My

gosh, am I sleepy! Believe I'll catch me forty winks."

With the efficiency of experience, Shep took off his torn coat and rolled it up to make a pillow, spread his bandanna over his face and carried out his suggestion. Ted watched him with envy. Shep never stayed awake when he was bored.

ON the following morning they were called to court. The judge, a benevolent-looking old gentleman with silver-rimmed spectacles and a white beard neatly trimmed in two points, read a book of incredible thickness during most of the hearing. The police asserted that Ted's revolver had been fired three times, and that the bullets corresponded to one taken out of the dead man, and they produced it in evidence. Two unprepossessing witnesses declared that they had seen the Yankee draw and fire. The judge expressed his sincere regret in rather elegant phrases, but found himself unable to accept Ted's unsupported denial, and felt obliged to return him until a formal trial could be held.

In the meantime it filled the judge with regret to hold the señores in a jail so ill-adapted to their entertainment, where there was at present rather a bad epidemic of fever. Perhaps the señores would like to get in touch with some friends in the States? Bail could be arranged.

"No," said Ted.

Or perhaps the scientific organization which the gentlemen represented?

"No."

The judge sighed as he relinquished his hope of a little income. He had one other alternative to offer, but it might seem a hard one. He could send Señor Thorndyke to the convict-camp up in the mountains which was building the *carretera real*.

"I'll go," Ted said. "It sounds healthier."

"Also farther away," muttered Shep.

The judge turned to him with a courtly bow. As for the Señor Brown, who had drunk perhaps too copiously of the native rum, he would not be held longer than necessary to discourage such disturbances, and to uphold the so-necessary majesty of the law. He might remain where he was, or he might go up-country with his friend.

"I'll go," said Shep. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Judge, but some ways, take it all in all, the Rio Triqua jail is the worst one I've ever been in. I don't

even begin to compare it to jails in the States; but in Colón, or in Colombia even—"

The judge rose. The señores would excuse him, but in English he was of a stupidity total. They might provide themselves with a change of linen from their stores. Their other effects would be held by the court. They would leave that afternoon.

He closed the big volume with a bang which sent a cloud of dust into the courtroom, and withdrew, followed by two soldiers.

Back in their cell, Shep and Ted talked things over.

"Maybe you'd better not come with me to that prison-camp," said Ted.

"I'll come," Shep answered.

"It doesn't sound so good, and you might have a better chance of being let out if you stay here."

"Let out? Don't you worry. If we get out, we'll have to do it ourselves."

"They can't hold you too long on that little charge."

"I'm coming with you," Shep said. "It's harder to get rid of two men than one, in case they plan on an accident."

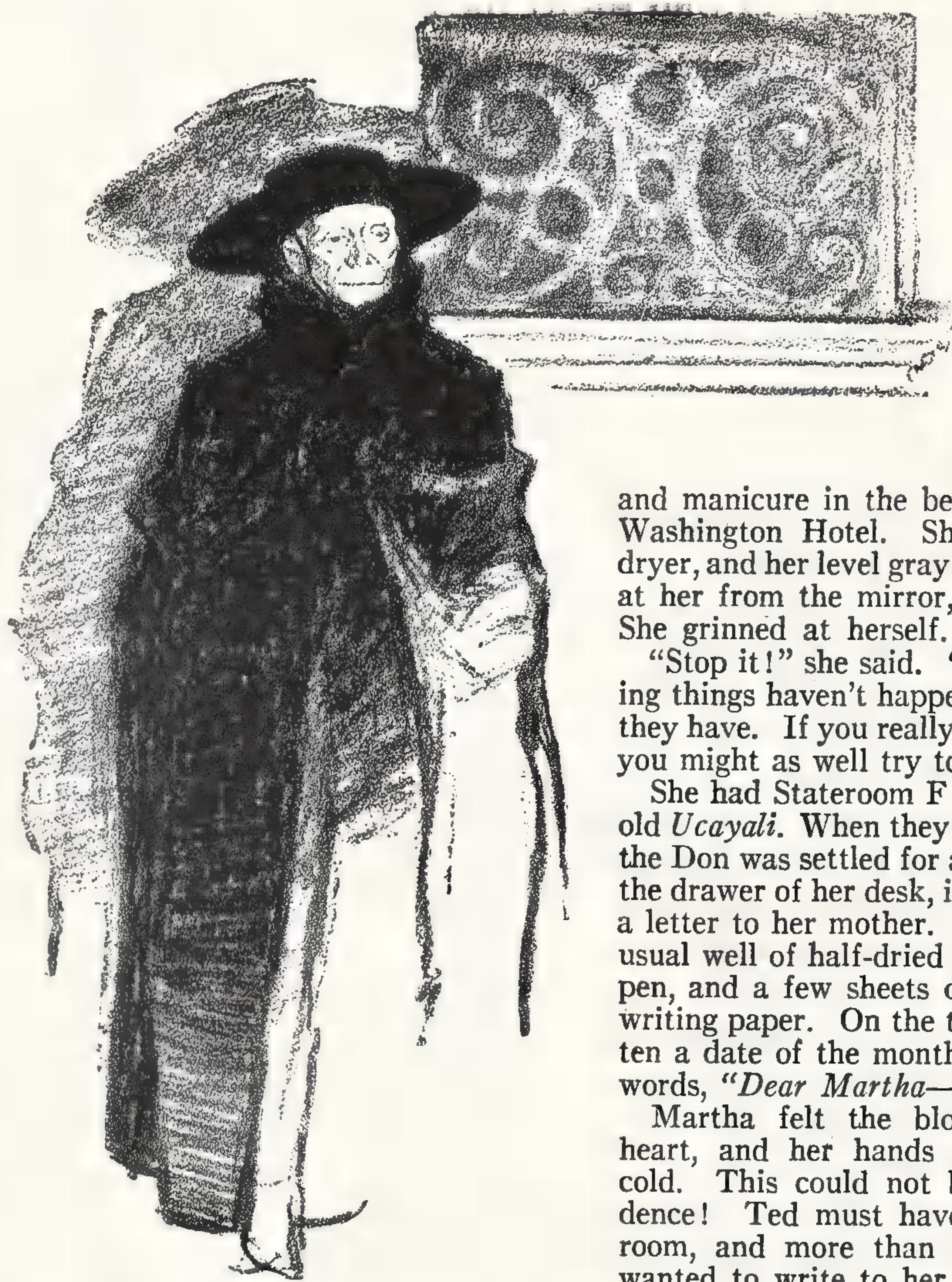
CHAPTER SEVEN

IN Panama it was raining as it can rain only in Panama—long gray sheets of warm water, falling straight across the city from a solid gray sky which seemed to have lost all restraint. At the Good Shepherd hospital, Martha Evans was as sad as the weather, for a month had passed with no word from Ted.

She stood in front of her little wall mirror one morning, pulling her crisp honey-colored hair into a bun, and addressed herself severely:

"My girl, I'm surprised at you. Of course he is tall and dark, and has those Irish blue eyes that can turn hot or cold, but what of that? Are you to be caught by appearances, and a nice blend of the manly and the naïve? You are, are you? Well, you don't seem to have registered, so you had better snap out of it."

She put on her well-starched uniform and fastened the stiff belt firmly around her trimly slim waist. No more nonsense, she told herself, perfectly aware that one half of her mind had no intention of taking good advice from the other half. The Indian orderly, who was her slave, met her in the hall and said that the superintendent was looking for her.



"My greetings to you, my children. . . . In the morning I shall hear all the news, and shall know how to reward your fidelity," said old Don Miguel.

She went to the office, more annoyed with herself than ever for feeling soothed and pleased by the doglike devotion in the halfbreed's eye.

"I've a job for you, Miss Evans, if you'll take it. You know Don Miguel Ferrara is about to go home."

"Yes. He fooled those nephews with the black hats."

"He has asked me to let you go with him to administer his insulin and instruct his servants about his diet until they have learned how to manage. Will you go, and can you be ready to leave for Parador tomorrow?"

"I'll go."

Martha's preparations were simple. The devoted orderly was sent to the laundry for a rush order on clean uniforms; a navy friend smuggled her a new pair of white shoes out of the commissary. In a burst of extravagance, she bought herself a dinner dress, and got a shampoo

and manicure in the beauty-shop of the Washington Hotel. She sat under the dryer, and her level gray eyes looked back at her from the mirror, faintly amused. She grinned at herself.

"Stop it!" she said. "No use pretending things haven't happened to you when they have. If you really want something, you might as well try to get it."

She had Stateroom F on the pounding old *Ucayali*. When they had left port and the Don was settled for a nap, she opened the drawer of her desk, intending to write a letter to her mother. It contained the usual well of half-dried ink, the scratchy pen, and a few sheets of yellowing ship writing paper. On the top one was written a date of the month before, and the words, "*Dear Martha—*"

Martha felt the blood rush to her heart, and her hands and feet turned cold. This could not be just a coincidence! Ted must have had this stateroom, and more than that, must have wanted to write to her. She would not try to imagine what had stopped him. She knew already that there was some mystery behind this trip of his. With a sentimentality which her common-sense refused to examine, she took the piece of paper, folded it, and stuck it in the pocket of her uniform over her heart.

A WEEK later she sat with Don Miguel on the rear platform of his private car, while the little train, three cars full of relatives and two locomotives, left the steaming coast behind, fought its way up incredible grades, and climbed into the bare wind-swept *parano*.

In retrospect, their three days in Maladon seemed too fantastic to be true. Don Miguel had been welcomed like a king by half the city and an incredible, impossible number of connections. They had stayed in the enormous old house of a cousin, where the grilled windows overlooked the river, all the floors were marble, and the bath-water was poured every

day by hand from silver ewers into a silver-plated tub. A constant stream of callers came to see His Excellency, ladies in black with placid pretty faces, who took his hand and shed tears over his recovery, and hurried off to church to burn more candles for him; gentlemen in white linen and light tan shoes, excessively courteous, and, it seemed to Martha, unduly warm-eyed. She set down their startled admiration to the fact that blondes were a rarity in Parador, and put on her crispest professional manner to get them out so her patient could rest.

ON the first night Don Miguel's widowed sister-in-law came to dine, bringing her son, her daughter and ten other guests. Martha was asked to join them, and sat between the son, Don Jaime, and a German gentleman, Herr Reiser. She had put on her dinner dress, a black chiffon with an organdie jacket, and was soon longing for the formal protection of her uniform.

Don Jaime was handsome in a tall flashing way, with his uncle's look of race, and a sensual mouth which he had apparently inherited from his mother. At first he described to her his plantation, with its principal town, Rio Triqua, and its innumerable bananas.

"It is not so large nor so beautiful as my uncle's territory," he said, "but I should like to show it to you."

"I should love to see it," answered Martha brightly, and found at once that she had given too much encouragement. Don Jaime's hand strayed under the table and began deftly caressing her. Martha moved a little closer to her German neighbor, but the hint was not taken. She turned her back on Don Jaime as pointedly as possible without making a scene, and tried to carry on a casual conversation with Herr Reiser, who was watching her through his monocle with disconcerting acuteness. Still finding herself annoyed, Martha took her fork, and without interrupting her flow of talk, plunged it under the table into the straying hand.

Don Jaime jumped, and hastily withdrew it, covering it with his napkin; and out of the corner of her eye Martha caught a look which certainly was not affectionate.

"Are there many Germans in Parador?" she inquired of Herr Reiser.

He had obviously been aware of the entire incident, and he was laughing. "Not many." He laughed again, quite

openly. "You will excuse me if I say it, but so direct you American women are! It is very interesting. In Europe if a man would ask a girl to his rooms, and if she would come, he would know what to do; but the American girl would come, and then he would find his troubles just beginning."

"Do you meet many Americans here?"

"Not many. But to me it is a fascinating study. There were two here awhile ago, a Mr. Brown and a Mr. Thorndyke, men of science. I enjoy them very much. With Americans it is possible almost always to tell what they will do. Many virtues they have, but subtle they are not."

"We think it is hypocritical to fool people," said Martha.

Reiser shrugged. "One must take the world as one finds it. You will be interested here, I think."

When they rose from the table, she escaped to her room. All the next day she had no time to herself; but to her great relief, the Don dined that night with gentlemen only, and suggested that she have a tray in her room, and that he would not need her to help him to bed before twelve o'clock. As soon as she had eaten, Martha put on a hat, and went quietly down the marble stairs with a sense of flight which seemed to her ridiculous, and went out.

SHE walked quickly along the broad Malecon, ignoring the sibilant whispers of young blades who wished to attract her attention, and went to the Gran Hotel Ritz.

"I wanted to ask if two American friends of mine were here," said Martha, and some new stirring of caution kept her from giving their names at once. "A tall dark gentleman, and a rather broad one, a good deal older."

The clerk beamed. It was a pleasure to oblige the so beautiful (and plainly so romantic) señorita.

"The scientific gentlemen? The Señores Brown and Thorndyke?"

"No," said Martha, and then caught her breath as she suddenly remembered Reiser's conversation at dinner the night before. "Yes. Yes, those are the ones."

"They have been gone nearly a month. They went first to Rio Triqua and then to the jungle, I believe. If the señorita would leave a message for when they come back—"

"You have no address for them?" asked Martha blankly.

"To the jungle, señorita, one does not write."

Martha went back to the house in a state of depression such as she rarely gave way to. She resisted the temptation to go to the movies, or to explore one of the darker side-streets—behaving, so she thought, with admirable discretion. It came, therefore, as a surprise to her when an old servant let her in, and she found herself facing a sort of welcoming committee composed of Don Miguel, Don Jaime and Herr Reiser, all looking both relieved and disapproving.

"My dear Miss Evans!" exclaimed Don Miguel. "How you have alarmed us! I must beg you to remember that you are not in your own country, and that you cannot follow its customs here. I understand, my dear young lady, that you are armored in innocence, but you might be very much misunderstood. I feel responsible for your safety, and I must insist that while you are here, you place yourself under my protection."

Genuinely disturbed at having committed the unpardonable sin of disconcerting her patient, Martha apologized, and promised not to be so reckless again. Feeling baffled, and uncomfortably close to incompetent, she went upstairs to prepare the bed and the evening hypodermic. Ted's trail was going to be harder to pick up than she had expected. Her intuition told her that there were unknown complications and undercurrents here, and that circumspection, a trait most unnatural to her, would be necessary. Incidentally, she felt definitely nettled that anyone as worldly-wise as she considered herself, should be described as "armored in innocence."

SHE had one more opportunity to make inquiries. Herr Reiser and Don Jaime took the train with them, but the adhesive on Don Jaime's hand gave her inhibitions about questioning him further on Rio Triqua. They spent the first night at Rio Bamba, since the railroad did not attempt the mountains after dark. In the morning Herr Reiser was to return to Maladon, and the rest of them were to go on by motor to Hacienda Tranquilla, the big Ferrara estate near Bolto.

Martha found herself beside Reiser at their very early breakfast on the hotel veranda, eating a peeled orange on a stick.

"I've just remembered," she said as casually as possible, "I met those Ameri-

cans you spoke of when they came through Panama."

She was conscious of a slight stiffening in her companion, and Don Miguel looked up from his coffee with one of his penetrating glances.

"Indeed?" asked Reiser. "Were they friends of yours in Maine?"

"Oh, no," answered Martha, with her newfound caution. "They knew some people I know in Colón. I have a message for them if I meet them anywhere. Do you know where they've gone?"

"By now with the Jivaros, probably," said Reiser genially. "I hope they keep the heads."

"Did they seem to be enjoying their trip?" asked Martha.

"They love it. Really, they love it," replied Reiser with finality.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A PROCESSION of motors left Rio Bamba, with Don Miguel and Martha in the first one. They drove away through a road lined with eucalyptus trees, past houses with hedges of blooming geranium, into the open country, where the fields were bright with wild heliotrope and golden blossom. In the distance the volcano Timboraza reared its eternal snows into the blue sky. The irrigated land was spread with alfalfa, grain and orchards.

Don Miguel leaned back and fell silent, breathing deeply of the pure mountain air; under the wrinkled lids his brilliant eyes were fixed on the remote volcano. Without words, Martha could sense his love of this country, his pride in its beauty, his intense feeling of possession.

After lunch the road grew worse, and the car fell into a mudhole. The chauffeurs crowded around it, shouting instructions to each other, jacking it up, filling the hole with stones, lifting and pushing. During this operation, which consumed half an hour, Don Miguel sat in a completely detached impassivity. Not until it was finished, and they bumped on again, did he turn to Martha with one of his charming smiles.

"We say in Parador that our roads are built for birds and not for men."

Martha smiled too. "Will we reach your place soon?"

"We have been on it since noon."

Shortly after that the road improved; the surface became smooth and hard, and showed signs of having been recently

worked over. Before long they passed a ragged group of laborers under two overseers in military uniform, one of whom carried a rifle, the other a sawed-off shotgun, and both of whom wore long black bull-whips coiled at their belts. They shouted; the men came to attention, and Don Miguel bowed absent-mindedly, like a king acknowledging salutes which had become commonplace. He said nothing, and Martha was rapidly learning not to ask questions if she wanted information.

Some miles farther on they came to another group; and this time one of the men did not fall in line as rapidly as the guard thought he should. The whip flashed out and knocked the ragged straw hat from his head. He was a tall man, naked to the waist, lean, and deeply sunburned, and he wore a full beard and a shock of dark matted hair. For a moment his hollow eyes looked into Martha's; then he turned away, and she saw an anchor tattooed on his left shoulder.

She bit her tongue to keep from crying out, and gooseflesh stood out on her arms. This haggard dirty man did not look like anyone she had ever seen before; but every day for three weeks she had bathed just such a shoulder. She could not keep herself from looking back. The man was swinging a pick in time with the others, not attempting to pick up his hat.

"Thanks to our prison labor battalions," observed Don Miguel smoothly, "Parador's roads will soon be second to none. Look, Miss Evans, how the declining sun lays rose and violet shadows on the snows of Timboraza."

THE sun had set, and the velvety equatorial night had fallen, when they came at last to Hacienda Tranquilla. A crowd of servants with torches lighted them to the doorway, and the wild flickering light showed immensely long low buildings of whitewashed adobe, red-tiled roofs with vines and flowers growing from the eaves, and a crowd of dark-faced men in striped ponchos.

Martha could not but admire the way in which the Don, old and frail and fatigued as she knew him to be, drew himself up and addressed them.

"My greetings to you, my children. I am happy to say that I have returned to you completely restored in health. In the morning I shall hear all the news, and I shall know how to reward your fidelity in my absence."

While the peons were still cheering the "Patrón," Martha followed a little Indian

girl who touched her arm and beckoned her into the house. They went down a long dark corridor, and into a huge room, bare except for a chair, a chest, a carved bed against one wall, a life-size crucifix and *prie-dieu* against another, and white llama skins on the floor. A fire of sweet cedar burned on a wide stone hearth, for with the darkness a sharp chill had come into the high thin air. The Indian girl was joined by another, and they began silently taking the things out of Martha's suitcase and putting them into the chest. Their little bare feet moved without a sound; their smooth black plaits and wide embroidered skirts bobbed busily back and forth. Martha regretted that she had not a large wardrobe to make use of so much service, and that she had to forbid them to touch her medical bag. They seemed unnaturally solemn and shy when she tried to make friends with them; but they told her at last, in halting Spanish with a strong Quechua accent, that their names were Lola and Pepita, and that they were sisters.

BEFORE long, someone knocked at one of the two doors of the room and opened it softly without waiting for a reply. Martha had an impression of a white face against the dark corridor; then a figure detached itself from the background, and she saw that it was a tall old woman, wearing a black dress which fitted her so loosely that it gave the impression of a flowing robe. She had been beautiful before harsh lines had cut themselves across her forehead and down from her nostrils to the corners of her mouth. When she spoke, her voice seemed to creak a little, like a door which is rarely used.

"His Excellency will see you now. He is going to bed. Your dinner will be here when you come back."

"If you will, be kind enough to tell me the way to his room."

The woman's dark eyes fastened themselves on Martha with an uncomfortable intensity. There was something in her expression at once disdainful and implacable. The little Indian girls had backed away from her as if they wished to flatten themselves against the wall and escape notice. She nodded briefly toward the other side of the room.

"That is the door," she said.

Martha hesitated for a moment; then she went to the door and knocked. It was opened for her, and she stepped



When the woman spoke, her voice seemed to creak: "His Excellency through and found herself in the Don's room.

He lay in an enormous bed with a dark wooden canopy so heavy and so elaborately carved that she thought at once of a crypt. It had red velvet curtains fringed with tarnished gold, and a red velvet cover frayed at the edges, on which was embroidered a coat of arms as large as a man's torso. Two great branched candelabra on either side of the bed threw a bright but wavering light

across him, and his pallor increased the impression of a corpse lying in state. Martha steadied her nerves and glanced at the man who had opened the door—then hastily looked back at the bed.

She had not been mistaken: there were two Don MIGUELS in the room, but the one on his feet was younger, and as dark as the old one was pale.

"My dear Miss Evans," said Don MIGUEL from the bed, "I hope you find yourself comfortable. This is Pedro, to



will see you now. He is going to bed. . . . That is the door."

whom you will give instructions as to my diet and care. If you will be good enough to complete your ministrations, I shall go to sleep."

Martha pulled herself together and put on the same imperturbable face with which she had confronted a hurricane and a typhus epidemic. Pedro took her into a small cabinet beside the room, where food could be prepared with most modern equipment, and she showed him how to use the scales and the diet-list. She

went through the no-longer-necessary routine of taking the patient's pulse and temperature, and explained the use of the hypodermic. Pedro listened to her quietly but with intelligent comprehension. When she had finished and was ready to say good-night, Don Miguel asked Pedro to leave them alone for a moment.

"My housekeeper, Señora Adela, came for you?" he asked Martha.

"She did not give me her name. A tall old lady, in black."

"Yes. Do not trust her."

Martha was so surprised at this that she could only repeat stupidly: "Do not trust her?"

"My child," said Don Miguel kindly, "you wish no evil to anyone, but you must not assume that all the world is like you. For myself, I have confidence in only one person, Pedro; and that because I know he is intelligent enough to realize how useful I am to him alive. . . . Another thing: You are in my country now, and not your own. I shall feel more comfortable if you will keep this by you when you go to bed."

He handed her a little dagger no longer than her hand, with a golden hilt chased in silver after the Moorish fashion.

"There are a great many people who would like to see me die," he remarked; "but I am not dead yet."

Martha stared at him, unable to reply.

"You may go, Miss Evans. I shall sleep tonight without drugs."

As Martha closed her door, she had a glimpse of Pedro slipping back into the Don's room as smoothly as a jaguar.

She ate her supper, and decided to go straight to bed, expecting to lie awake for a while and think things over; but fatigue and her healthy nerves betrayed her. She was unable to make Lola and Pepita understand that she wanted them to leave her; and her last glimpse was of two shining little black heads side by side on the llama rug in front of the fire.

"I won't have them sleeping here," she said to herself—and then it was morning.

IN the brilliant morning sunshine, Hacienda Tranquilla seemed to have lost its ominous brooding quality, and Martha was inclined to laugh at her theatrical impressions of the night before. A car was placed at her disposal, and a horse. She chose the horse, put on the costume which was brought her, and came out, to find Pedro ready to act as guide. They rode out of the farming valley and began climbing trails which twisted around incredible hills, through a bare wind-swept country where the eye could carry fifty miles to a distant avenue of snow-capped volcanoes. The air was sweet, and Martha's horse was fresh enough to keep her occupied. Hacienda Tranquilla would be a paradise, she thought, for anyone who had nothing to do except to dream life away in beautiful surroundings.

Unfortunately, she did not fit in that category, and her efforts to draw out the untalkative Pedro were not successful.

"We passed a gang of convict labor on the way here," she said.

"They are working a long way off."

"In which direction?"

"There," said Pedro, pointing southward and turning his horse to the north.

THEY drew aside on a narrow trail to let pass a train of shaggy llamas, stepping as daintily as bewitched queens, their heads high, their eyes soft under drooping lids. They were on their way to the village market, Pedro told her.

"Let's go and see it."

"Not today, if the señorita pleases. The peons will be drunk."

"I've seen people drunk before now."

"The señorita will do me the favor not to go today," Pedro answered softly. He turned his horse back toward the ranch, and Martha had no choice but to follow.

They rode back through a wide green valley, cultivated, but strangely solitary. There was motion in only two spots in all the wide landscape. One was a horseman, whom Martha recognized as Don Jaime on a fine stallion, curveting and prancing in a way gorgeous to behold; the other was where a couple of Indians—a man and a woman—were hitched like oxen to a wooden plow, while a second man guided it. Martha reined in.

"What troubles the señorita?" asked Pedro.

Martha pointed at the plowing.

"The señorita must realize that for some of my people work-animals would be a luxury."

The man who was guiding the plow made his whip sing over the heads of the man and the woman, and they threw themselves against the crude rope harness and struggled on. Their faces were as blank as those of cattle, and there was no protest in their large expressionless eyes. Don Jaime came abreast of the riders and swept off his hat.

"It is good to see the señorita abroad this morning under a heaven not so blue as her eyes."

But Martha was curt. "That man was whipping those people," she said.

Don Jaime shrugged. "What do you want? The Indians are not too fond of work. They must be encouraged a little. So long as they get enough coco to chew at lunch, they do not care."

"What is coco?"

"The leaf of a plant. It contains a little cocaine, but not enough to be harmful. They are able to start chewing it when they are quite small children."

Martha pulled herself together. No protests of hers were going to change conditions so generally accepted; and she reminded herself that she would be wiser to keep silent. She made an effort to speak lightly about something else, and Don Jaime rode beside her back to the hacienda, pouring out compliments at which she tried to look pleased. After all, she thought, it would be very unpleasant to have a feud with a member of the family by whom she was employed, and she was glad that he seemed to bear no malice for the incident at the dinner-table. On the other side of her, Pedro rode in silence. The two men had not spoken to each other. . . .

A week passed, with so little to distinguish the days that Martha felt that she was dreaming. Her duties grew lighter and lighter as the silent and capable Pedro took over, and soon she could not pretend to herself that there was any professional necessity for her to remain. Never was she allowed to go out alone; nor when she rode did she select her route, although the decisions were made for her with the smoothest and most deceptive courtesy. Indoors, the two little Indian girls dogged her footsteps unless she was with the Don. Outside, Pedro was constantly beside her. Obviously she would find out nothing more about Ted and Shep while she stayed here. She decided to leave, and to take a week or two in the country by herself before she went back to Panama.

MARTHA made this decision after a sleepless night; as a result, she felt cheerful in the morning. She cut short her ride, put on her uniform, and went to find the Don. At this hour he was usually in a large vaulted room which had been a chapel before his mother had built a more elaborate one, and which he now used for an office. Since she had not seen any visitors arrive, she assumed that he would be alone. She knocked, and receiving no answer, opened the door.

Don Miguel sat at the head of a long table piled with maps, and surrounded by ten or twelve unsmiling gentlemen in their shirt-sleeves. Martha stammered an apology and withdrew, but not before she had had time to see that they were all wearing guns at their belts or in shoulder holsters. In some confusion she retired to her room and stayed there until lunch-time, when she found herself eating alone with Señora Adela, who usually avoided her.

"Good morning," said Martha. Señora Adela did not answer, and they ate in silence. Not until they had finished, did the housekeeper speak again.

"His Excellency asks you to have the goodness to remain in your room this afternoon."

"As he wishes," said Martha, with a shrug which she thought very Spanish.

Señora Adela went on speaking, as though she could not contain her spite.

"You are no longer useful to him. It is better that you keep out of the way."

"I am under his orders," Martha answered, biting back a premature disclosure of her plans.

"Men do not know everything," said Señora Adela. She rose and stalked out, her long black nunlike draperies flapping around like broken wings. Her passage through a room left a heavy musty odor like decaying plants.

The afternoon dragged interminably. Martha wrote some letters and did some sewing; and Lola and Pepita squatted on the rug before the fireplace and followed her with their bright eyes every time she walked across the room. She had given up asking them to leave her, or trying to hold a conversation with them, for they would only giggle and pretend not to understand. The bright light faded out of the high sky, and dusk crept into the room. Lola and Pepita lit the candles in front of the *prie-dieu* and laid a fire. No sound came through the thick adobe walls. When someone knocked at last on the inside door, the sudden noise seemed as loud as thunder, and Martha jumped to answer it, frightened in spite of herself by the isolation and the silence.

Pedro stood there, grave and courteous as usual, telling her that Don Miguel was very tired, and would like a massage before he slept. . . . The old man lay in the great dark bed with his eyes closed, looking more shrunken than he had done since he left the hospital. It was obviously impossible to discuss anything with him; Martha worked over him quietly, and left her decision unannounced.

CHAPTER NINE

NEXT morning Martha told Pepita to ask when she could see Don Miguel. It amused her to reflect how her attitude had changed in the comparatively short time she had been at Hacienda Tranquila. Now, instead of bouncing into her patient's room with professional assur-

ance, she sent a messenger to know when she could be admitted into the "presence." Nothing had been said directly to make her feel this necessary. It had been done by implication. The Don was, she realized, the strongest personality she had ever encountered.

AS soon as she entered the bedroom, she saw he was having one of his bad days. On these occasions it was his custom to shut himself up and inform the household that he was working. He would never allow himself to be seen like most invalids, lying about in a long chair, or basking idly in the sunshine. When he appeared outside of his own room, it was always fully dressed, and in apparently vigorous health. Only Martha and the ubiquitous Pedro were allowed to catch him off guard; and Martha, who knew what his appearances sometimes cost him, could not but admire his spirit.

He lay now absolutely motionless in the depths of the great bed, his skin no brighter than the yellowing linen sheets. His brilliant eyes, startlingly full of fire and intelligence, looked at her searchingly. For some reason, Martha found it remarkably hard to tell him that she had decided to leave. Because it was hard to say, she blurted it out.

He did not answer her for a while.

"Miss Evans," he said at last, "I cannot bring myself to dispense with your services."

"But Don Miguel, Pedro is very competent. I would not think of leaving if I didn't know that you could get along just as well without me."

"I should prefer," answered Don Miguel softly, "to have you stay a little longer. I need you, and I shall see that you are made comfortable."

"That is just it. I'm too comfortable already. It may sound silly, but truly, I can't be happy unless I am working. I can't stay here and be paid for just riding horseback."

Don Miguel gave her one of his piercingly sympathetic smiles. "I have encountered that truly North American philosophy before. I respect it, without wishing to adopt it. Perhaps I can find a way to keep you busier. You have spoken to me of the fact that you never go out without encountering a child's funeral. I can arrange for you to hold a clinic and treat some of the children of my Indians. I cannot hold out to you much promise of success—we have found that the Indians do not lend themselves

to improvement; but I shall be interested to see you try."

"I would like that very much, but really I must go. There are some things I want to do before I leave Parador, and I must get back to my job in Panama."

Don Miguel looked at her shrewdly.

"Miss Evans, please do not consider me too cynical. When a young lady becomes as restless as you appear to be, there is usually a much stronger motive behind it than she is willing to allege. I strongly suspect you, Miss Evans, of being in love."

Martha felt a flush which she could not control as she replied:

"No. That is, not really."

"I suspect you, too, of a more than casual interest in those two countrymen of yours about whom you inquired in Maladon."

"I don't see why you should say that," declared Martha hotly.

"I am an old man. You have been very kind to me, and I am grateful. I should like you to look upon me as a father, and feel that you could confide in me. It is possible that if the object of your interest is in this country, I could help you find him."

SOME instinctive caution, which Martha could not comprehend, made her answer: "Really, Your Excellency, you are jumping to conclusions."

"I have said that I am an old man. At my age, time becomes too important. One has not enough of it. But you, Miss Evans, you have no need to hurry. Stay here awhile. With patience many problems solve themselves."

"Don Miguel, you are kind. I'd like to stay, if only to please you. But I can't. Really I can't. I must go."

The fingers of one small boned waxy hand drummed on the coverlet. When he spoke, his voice was crisp and incisive:

"You force me to say something which I had hoped I might be spared the necessity of saying. I cannot permit you to go."

"What do you mean?"

"You must stay here, whether you wish it or not."

"But you can't keep me if I don't want to stay!"

Don Miguel began to look bored and patient. "Sit down, Miss Evans, and let us reason together: It is painful to me to commit the discourtesy of reminding you that you are thirty miles from a railroad, and that I control every means of trans-

portation here. You could not even walk, for my peons are loyal to me until death,—or at least, they know that they will die if they are not loyal, which comes to the same thing."

"I'll write to the consul," said Martha.

"If you will open the top drawer of my writing-desk, you will find all the letters you have written during your stay here. I must beg your pardon, for I took the liberty of detaining them."

Martha had had enough discipline in her life to recognize a situation when she saw one, and not to exhaust herself in hysterical and futile protests until she had had time to think things out. She set her lips firmly and said nothing.

DON MIGUEL's expression relaxed, and he continued speaking in a manner so winning, so full of charm, that it was easy to understand why women had found him irresistible in his youth.

"Miss Evans, you have been most kind to me. Try to forgive me. I will take you into my confidence and you will see that I am not so arbitrary as I seem. You have seen my visitors. You would be less intelligent than I think you if you did not suspect that something serious was about to happen."

"I try to mind my own business."

"*Claro.* But it is unfortunate that you interrupted our meeting yesterday. I have confidence in your discretion, but there are others who will not take that attitude. Would it really surprise you to hear that my country is on the verge of a revolution?"

"Nothing would surprise me," said Martha, tersely.

Don Miguel permitted himself a small wintry smile, and went on.

"I don't know why I should explain this to you, but I shall do so. Our present government is not to be trusted, is not sensible. At this rate the nation will soon be bankrupt. Everything will be taken away from the people who know how to handle wealth, and given to those who will dissipate it and throw it away. It is absurd to think that the Indians, who have had centuries of sinking into animalism, can be made over in a few years. They must be helped, of course. I myself have started a school in one of my villages. But they should be helped by people who will understand them instead of imposing on them ideas from an alien civilization. To be frank, in your

country, a democratic government may suit the temperament of the people. In mine, it will be fatal. I love my country, Miss Evans; I want to see it take a proud place among the nations."

"That I understand."

"Then I must save it from the people who would ruin it. Our plans are complete. Jaime is going tonight, to Maladon. He is enthusiastic about this revolution, for if I succeed and then die, as soon I must, he will inherit the leadership. In two days our ports will be closed. Until peace is restored, I must keep you under my protection. If you were to leave now, it might be assumed that you were carrying away essential information. Frankly, Miss Evans, you would not live to reach the coast."

Martha frowned, but did not answer.

"Really, Miss Evans, you must stay for my sake," said Don Miguel winningly. "If I let you go, I myself will be suspected of disloyalty to my cause, and my followers will cease to have faith in me. You will be endangering your patient."

"You make it hard for me to refuse," said Martha ironically, but the Don refused to hear the undertones in her voice.

"Splendid! Then we are agreed. When our little trouble is over and I am president, you shall leave with a guard of honor. I hope it will be soon. Let us shake hands on it, in the American way."

HE held out his hand, and Martha took it. It did not reassure her. Nor was she reassured by the confidences he had just made her. She did not have to be bright to realize that he would never have told her so much if he were not completely sure she could not escape him.

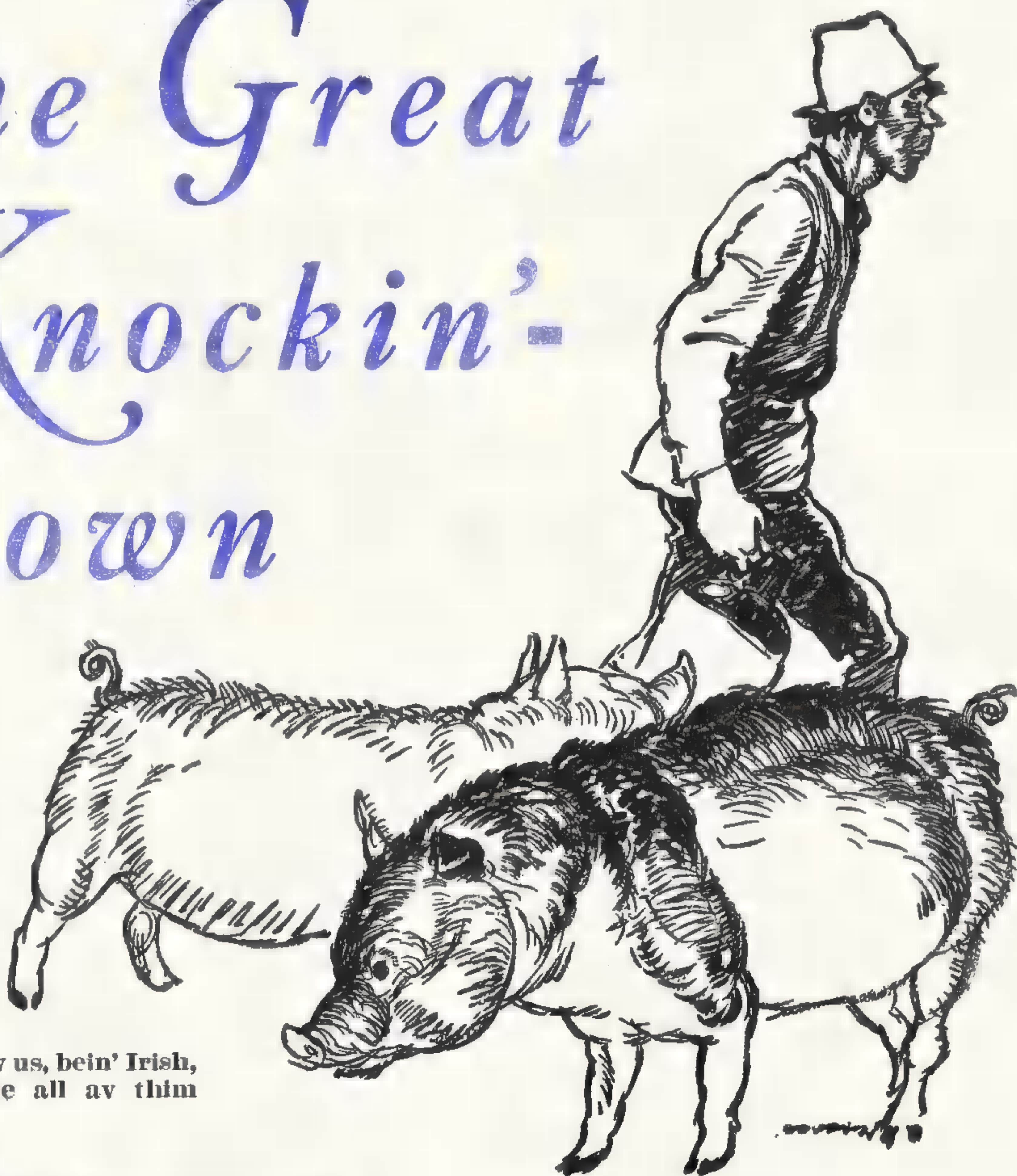
"For the present," he said in his most charming manner, "I hope you will not object if I ask Pedro to act as your special protector. I wish to be sure of your safety, and even in my household there are elements which are not entirely friendly. Pedro I can trust."

"He looks very like you," said Martha.

"Why not? He is my son. Adela is his mother. She has wanted me to marry her, ever since my wife died; but one can hardly legitimize a boy after forty years." He lay back on his pillows, looking pleased at having settled everything. "Yes. I can trust Pedro. While I am alive, he is in command here. When I die and Jaime inherits, it will be a different story."

This novel of "Parador"—which could be any one of several countries, all specially interesting to us at present—will be continued in our forthcoming February issue.

The Great Knockin'-Down



"The four av us, bein' Irish, can lick the all av thim together!"

TIMMY COSTIGAN was sitting by the doorway of the old courthouse, his chair tipped back against the base of one of the great pillars, his blue eyes half closed as his shrunken body soaked in the spring sunshine. I had not seen the old man for a year after the time he had solved for me the mystery of the Banshee Trail, that weird survey line in the hills of southern Ohio.

"Hasn't the Banshee wailed for ye yet, Timmy Costigan?" I asked.

"'Tis ha-ard av hearin' I am, whin the Banshee wails," he replied complacently, his eyes lighting with a smile of recognition. "I'm not l'avin' this world till it pleasures me to go."

"Ye hear well enough whin somewan says *drink*," I hinted, imitating his gentle brogue.

"'Tis seldom wan hears thot in these ha-ard times," he admitted.

"The flask is empty," I confessed. "But I can send across the square and have it filled."

"'Tis no need," said Timmy. "I hov a jug in the sheriff's office, if Your Honor would do me proud to dhrink with me.

'Tis corn thot's been twice through the still and wanst through the wood—and niver a tax on it."

"The sheriff's office?" I questioned.

"'Tis a safe place none would be after lookin' in—and the sheriff doesn't drink."

We climbed over the worn treads of stairs hollowed by generations of seekers after justice, to the sheriff's office; and Timmy, opening a door marked "*Private*" and a drawer labeled "*Confidential Reports*"—produced a glass jug glowing with mellow amber tints.

"One might think ye owned the courthouse, Timmy," I remarked when he produced tin cups.

"And be rights I should," he replied after swallowing what he called a "wee dhrup," which was about half a cup.

"The doctor said I could hov a mouthful a day," he explained as he refilled the cup. "But he did not say whither a man's mouthful or a cow's."

"Why should ye own the courthouse?" I persisted.

"Sure, and why not?" he replied sharply. "But for the gran'ther av me, the



There were ructions aplenty in frontier Ohio, and the wild Irish pioneers found life to their liking.

By HUGH FULLERTON

Shano Boards I was after tellin' ye about, him thot wor the Banshee, there would be no courthouse here, nor anny town."

"Shano must have been a grand man," I ventured, hoping for another tale of the pioneer who had surveyed the boundary of the land I had bought for the Rod and Gun club.

"He wor," said Timmy positively. "He lived to be ninety-six years old, and was kilt by a jealous husband."

The old man swallowed another half cupful of the potent liquor without even blinking.

"Here's to his memory!" I toasted, and after choking and drinking ice-water, I added: "But how was it he built the courthouse here?"

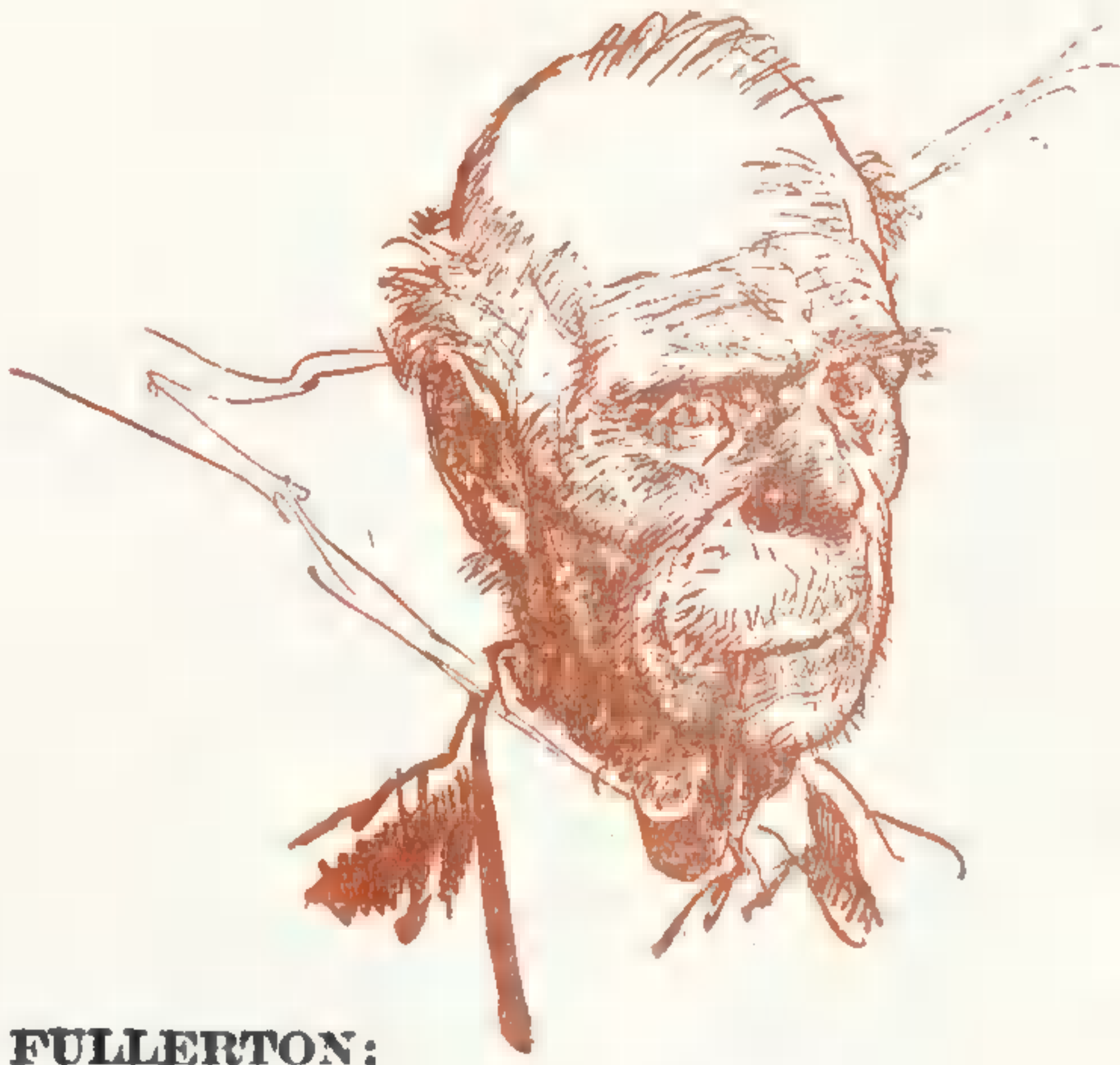
"Be after pourin' another wee dhrop, and I'll tell ye the tale," he said. "Be rights, there should be a statue av him in the yard, and I should be after ownin' the town, instead of bein' janitor."

"Say when," I counseled, as he held the cup to the jug.

"Faith, and I forget intirely the word ye said to say," he remarked when the cup was full.

We drank again to the memory of Shano Boards, and this is the tale Timmy Costigan told:

WHEN Shano came back to Manchester by the river, after he saved two of his friends from scalping, he found himself by way of being a famous man. The tale was told all through the wilderness of how he killed five Shawnee braves with one stone hatchet; and the story grew none the less for its being oft told. General Nat Massie, who built Manchester and surveyed most of the hill country, was proud of Shano, and boasted that no better man ever went with him on a survey. He gave Shano land, with a log cabin and a fine spring; and Shano, with the hills swarming with game and the creeks with fish, all for



FULLERTON:

"Who'll we be neutral against?"

the taking, and with the corn whisky to warm him, was content. There were times when the sadness was on him, and he lifted the great voice of him and greeted for longing for Ireland; but at the dancing and the house-raising, he was a great man in the settlement, with not a care in the world.

Then one day in the spring a flatboat came down the big river. In that day the coming of a boat meant news from the world, and new settlers; and when word came that a boat was coming, all the folk in Manchester went down the hills to the landing, to greet the newcomers, and Shano went with them. When the boat was a mile upstream, he lifted the voice of him and shouted a welcome that echoed back from the hills.

'Twas little thinking he was that fate was pursuing him, and he was one of the first to leap into the water to grab a rope and help draw the big flatboat to the landing. And as he was hauling on the rope, the eyes of him lifted to the boat—and he saw a sight that made him let loose of the rope and leap backward.

A tall, strong girl was standing there; and he saw 'twas Maureen, the constable's daughter from Philadelphia, for whom he had promised to build a castle. At the first sight he was minded to run back up the hill and flee into the woods; but at the second sight, he saw that she was far handsomer and stronger-looking than any other woman of the settlement, and the mind of him changed in a minute, and he waded fast into the water, and without waiting for the boat to touch, he reached up and lifted her, carrying her in his arms to the shore, and her with the strong white arms of her around his neck and laughing happily.

"'Tis Maureen, who is come to be the wife of me as soon as we can find a parson to wed us!" he shouted, introducing her to the settlers.

"And have you the castle already built, Shano Boards?" she asked.

"'Tis no castle," he said. "I've been so busy helpin' the General survey, and killin' Injuns, 'tis little time I've had to build a castle. A wee cabin is all I hov."

"I heard of you fightin' the savages," she said. "'Tis no matter about the castle. I'd rather have a king without a palace, than a palace without a king."

THE wedding was a grand occasion, and the first that ever was held in Manchester. The Reverend Jimmy Quinn was riding the wilderness, and he was brought to perform the ceremony; and General Massie himself gave the bride away, and a whole barrel of usquebaugh was drunk. 'Twas a great day; and everyone from Limerock, on the river, and from all the wilderness about, brought gifts; and the men, between drinks, raised logs for another room for the cabin, predicting that Shano and Maureen would fill it soon.

Maureen had brought two featherbeds, and some silver knives and forks from Philadelphia, and in all the district there was no finer cabin. For two whole years they lived happy in the cabin.

But Shano was not satisfied; the country was filling with settlers, and General Massie was settling new towns on the lands he owned, and planning others. Too crowded it was getting for Shano, and the hunting was harder.

"'Tis no castle we'll iver hov here," Shano told Maureen when the second baby was starting to walk. "Soon there'll be no room left to grow enough corn to make usquebaugh, or feed the pigs. 'Tis further we must go."

So Shano went to General Massie.

"Gineral, darlint, I've a mind for movin' to where 'tis less settled," he said.

"I gave ye land," said the General, "close by the town. Do ye be wantin' more?"

"Just a wee bit more, Gineral, about the size of the County Kerry. I'm wishful of goin' into the wilderness, where me whisperin' won't be disturbin' all the neighbors, and where I can build a castle for Maureen and the childer."

"You can have all the land you can use, Shano," said the General. "I have much land in the highlands that I'll trade you for your cabin. The settlers have

little heart for going far, and will pay well for land near the village."

"I'll be startin' tomorrow," Shano said. "And where be this land?"

"'Tis in the hills, between two grand creeks," said the General. "'Tis heavily wooded, with fine springs of clear running water, and room for a dozen castles if the land is cleared. But 'tis a land loved by the Indians for hunting."

"Sure, and I'll hov no trouble with the Injuns," said Shano. "They're nawthin' but sunburnt Irishmen thot hov run wild. I hov but to unloose the voice of me, and they'll run, as they did on the trail."

"And would you be after wantin' anything else, Shano?" asked the General, mindful of the debt he owed my gran'ther for saving his men from the Indians.

"If it plaze Yer Honor," Shano whispered, "I'd loike a few feet av copper pipe, and p'raps a kittle."

"Ho-ho!" said the General. "And can ye cooper a barrel for the mash?"

"I can thot," said Shano. "'Tis the white-oak staves thot are best. Mayhap by the time ye come surveyin' thot way, I'll offer ye usquebaugh better than anny made in this country."

'Twas a week later that Shano went out of the fort dragging a sled behind him on the snow; and on the sled were Maureen's feather-beds, and a copper kettle, and a length of copper pipe, with the ax and the blankets, and the oldest boy tied atop the feather-beds. Behind him Maureen pulled another sled, with the baby tied on with the pots and pans.

WHEN Shano and Maureen came to the rocky creek General Massie had marked, the snow was gone; the last few days, after they passed the last settlement around New Market, Shano was forced to drag the sleds over wet leaves through the great woods that covered the hills. They were sore and weary when they came to a spring that gushed from a hillside in an open glade in a fine forest. The spring poured out from a small cave in the lime-rock, and the water made pleasant gurgling sounds.

"'Tis far enough we've come," said Shano. "It must be after bein' the place the Ginerel marked. 'Tis bechune two cricks, and 'tis a grand place where a mon can loose the voice av him with none to hear."

"Don't be after exercising the voice whilst the bairns are sleepin'," said Maureen. "And 'tis enough exercise ye'll get choppin' trees for the castle."



BURKE:

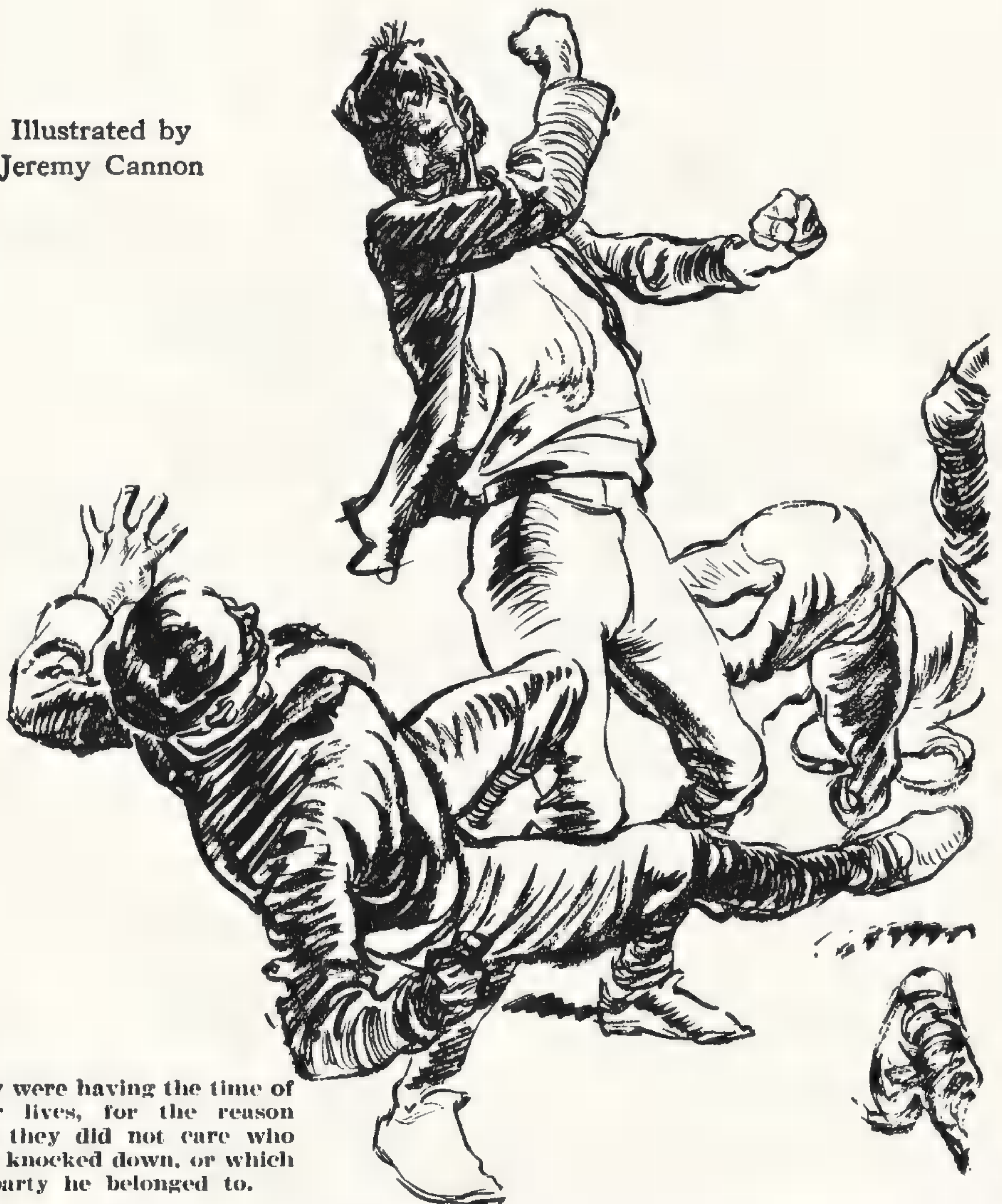
"'Tis a grand
fight there'll be;
I'd not be after
missin' it."

All the spring and the summer Shano chopped trees and cleared land, and built the cabin, taking no time from the work except to catch fish in the brook, and hunt when meat was needed. He could howl to the limit of the voice of him whilst working; and in the evenings he bent the copper pipe around a small tree to make a worm, and by the firelight he hewed staves from a great white oak, and coopered barrels to hold the mash. Never had he worked so hard, and never was he so joyful; and he sang and howled to heart's content, saying he would scare the Indians so far away in the morning they never could get back by the night. The Indians were busy with their wars to the north and to the east; but few came into the hills except for the hunting.

In June the corn was planted between the stumps of trees. Maureen dropped the praties in the stump land; then with the two of them working, they rolled the logs and raised them into walls, and Shano dragged stones from the creek-bank to make the chimney. And come the fall, the cabin was tight and warm, and there was enough corn so that he could keep the still dripping away in the cave where the cold water ran down to chill the worm.

By another summer there were neighbors, and some close enough that they might hear the great voice of him echoing through the woods, and there was a cow penned near by safe from the wolves so the childer might have milk, and Maureen was happier than any queen in a castle. A few miles away on the Clear

Illustrated by
Jeremy Cannon



They were having the time of their lives, for the reason that they did not care who they knocked down, or which party he belonged to.

Creek was Amos Evans from Virginia, and Captain Billy Hill, who had fought with Washington; and on the Rocky Fork a few miles to the south were Dunn and Burke and Fullerton, three wild Irish who had fought in the Continental army and who loved naught so much as they did a fight, except mayhap a drink that led to a fight and improved one.

Few came to the cabin, save the three wild Irishers from the Rocky Fork who came to compare the corn liquor they made with that of Shano, and argued until Maureen swept them from the cabin with the broom—using the handle.

Not far from the cabin was a gum woods, where the passenger pigeons came to roost by millions. So thick they were at the migrating-time that the sun was shut off by the masses of birds, and at night they roosted in the big trees so thick that the weight of them broke the great limbs from the gums, and the forest

looked as if it had been threshed by a hurricane, and tens of thousands of the birds were dashed to death. . . .

"Ye have wandered a long ways from the courthouse, Timmy Costigan," I chided him when he ceased talking, to drink from the tin cup and refill his pipe. "Ye were to tell me how your grandfather, Shano, should by rights own the courthouse—and now ye talk of pigeons."

"'Tis a mon av few words I am," said Timmy. "And I'm comin' to the courthouse, if so be ye give me time."

THE beat of the pigeons' wings lulled Shano (so said Timmy, after he had puffed for a moment at his pipe). The noise of them in the roost was like the far pounding of surf on Galway's shores, and it lulled him to sleep, and to dream of Ballyhaunus and the auld sod. But 'twas the pigeons that brought the woe to Shano. One night sitting by the doorway



of the cabin, with Maureen putting the bairns to bed inside, he heard the roar of the birds like the distant sea, and it brought the homesickness upon him. He longed for the incense of peat-smoke and the breath of the sea over the bogs. His heart was sore for longing, and he rolled back the head of him and greeted with all the strength of his great lungs, never thinking of bringing trouble.

Now from the flat lands in the lower settlements the herders had come driving their hogs to fatten them on the dead birds under the roosting-trees; and as Shano's voice rose in the banshee wail that had scared half the folk in County

Mayo, he heard a new noise far away, that grew louder. He greeted again, and there was a sound as of a great storm sweeping through the forest, and a thousand pigs came grunting and running through the woods, and burst into the clearing. The great voice of him, reaching miles away, had brought the pigs to root the praties, and to try to reach the mash ripening in the barrels.

"Wurra! Wurra! Wurra!" said Shano. "Are pigs to be the death av me yit? His Lordship, dear mon, chased me from Ireland for poachin' wan wee piggie—and here I but lift the voice of me, and hundreds come."

Maureen, coming to the door to see the cause of the racket, picked up her broom and moved to lay it on Shano.

"Screech, man, screech!" she said. "Or I'll be after belaborin' ye with the broom."

"But Maureen, darlint," said Shano, "always ye are warnin' me not to wail, and to kape the big mouth of me shut."

"'Tis the first time the voice of ye ever sounded swate to me," she said.

"Open the door av the fence and yell louder. 'Tis thinkin' I am that if ye call, more pigs'll come, and we'll feed the creatures and have hams and bacon for the winter."

Shano lifted the voice of him, calling the pigs; and by nightfall the big pen built of rails to save the cow and calf from the wolves was filled with squealing pigs. The acorns were deep under the oaks, and Maureen fed them of the mash from the barrels; so they settled down in content, never missed by the drovers. Shano found himself more content, for with the pigs grunting under the cabin and scratching their backs against the logs, it was more homelike than the cot in Ballyhaunus.

Come fall, and the corn pulled, Shano sent for his friends the three wild Irish from the Rocky Fork to help him kill and smoke the pigs; and when they came, they brought a jug for Shano to sample and compare with the run of usquebaugh from his own still.

"'Tis little we can spare," Dunn asserted. "We're savin' a keg for the big foregatherin' at the New Market town."

"Whin is thot?" demanded Shano. "'Tis so busy I've been, not a word hov I heard av it."

"'Tis a meetin' to decide on the new county town," Dunn explained. "The folk say they canna live there because of the shakes."

"Whin I wor there," Burke put in, "'twas the chills and fever I hod so bad I shook half the usquebaugh from the glass liftin' to the mouth av me."

"Shut up and let a mon explain, won't ye?" demanded Dunn.

"We will not," said the other two.

By the time the jug was emptied, the tale was told. Many of the New Market settlers believed that the water standing on the flat lands brought on the ague and malaria, and wanted to move the town to the hills, where the springs were clear and gushed from the limestone; but the business men wanted the county town to remain where their stores were built.

SO there was no agreeing among them where a new town should be built. The Clear Creek settlers, with Captain Billy Hill and Amos Evans to lead them, wanted the town on their land; and the Quakers over on Holliday's Run wanted it there, and the Rocky Fork settlers insisted that there was the proper place.

"I'm after thinkin' 'tis the best place av all," Burke suggested. "'Tis a grand

fight there'll be after bein' before 'tis settled. I'd not be after missin' it."

"The Fork is the place," Dunn agreed. "The four av us, bein' Irish, can lick the all av thim together!"

"'Tis not sinse to be after fightin' thim all," Burke prompted. "We'll be after sayin' nawthin av wantin' the town on the Fork till the others have fought it out. Thim we can step in and lick the winner—him bein' worn thin."

"Thot's the way the English always hov done," said Dunn.

"'Tis no husband of mine that'll be after fightin'," Maureen declared. "'Tis neutral ye'll all be."

"'Tis no sport bein' neutral," said Shano.

"Wan more word, and ye'll not be goin' at all," Maureen declared, holding tight to the broomstick which Shano himself had cut from a scrub oak.

"P'raps 'tis best we be neutral," he said. "Captain Billy is me friend, and Colonel Barrere, thot kapes the inn, is me friend."

"And if we're after bein' neutral, who'll we be neutral against?" asked Fullerton.

THE argument kept up till the jugs were empty and Maureen had turned them all into the shed to sleep; and early the next day the four of them set out to walk to New Market, stopping at the Rocky Fork to fill the jugs again.

But the arguing was all finished and the knocking-down had been started before the four of them even reached the New Market. 'Twas started when one New Market man hit a Clear Creeker; in a minute everyone was fighting that could get close enough to the door of the inn to join the battle. The four Rocky Forkers who had agreed to remain neutral watched for a minute; but Dunn could not resist the temptation, and when someone hit Fullerton, Burke joined in, leaving Shano standing close by regretting that he had promised Maureen that he would remain neutral, no matter what happened.

The sheriff was a bold man and a lawful one, and he tried hard to break up the ruckus. He lepped on the backs of the fighters, and hauled them one by one to the rear of the lot where the log jail stood.

'Twas a hot day, and the sheriff was sweating and laboring, and he had dragged a dozen or more around to the jail and locked them in, they fighting and scratching at every step. And after one trip, he pushed a big Clear Creeker

into the jail and locked the door, when he stopped to wipe his brow and to look over the square where the crowd was fighting, and the worry filled him for fear he wouldn't have enough room for all of them, and lest they should be after keeping up the fighting inside and tear the walls down. Having to knock down each one he arrested and then drag him to the cell was hard work, and the sheriff was sore weary as he started back into the thick of it. And just then he saw Dunn and Burke crawling out between logs at the back of the jail, and remembered he had arrested each of them twice before, which made him mad with the anger; and before he could grab either one of them, they were back in the fracas, having the time of their lives for the reason that they did not care who they knocked down or which party he belonged to. After each knocking-down they went into the tavern and had a drink to celebrate.

All this time Shano Boards was standing idle, wishful of being in the thick of it, and striving to remember what Maureen had told him. He was seeing the sheriff when he dragged Dunn and Burke to the jail-house, and when he saw them rolling into the tavern for a drink, he said:

"'Tis thinkin' I was that the sheriff jugged ye in the calaboose?"

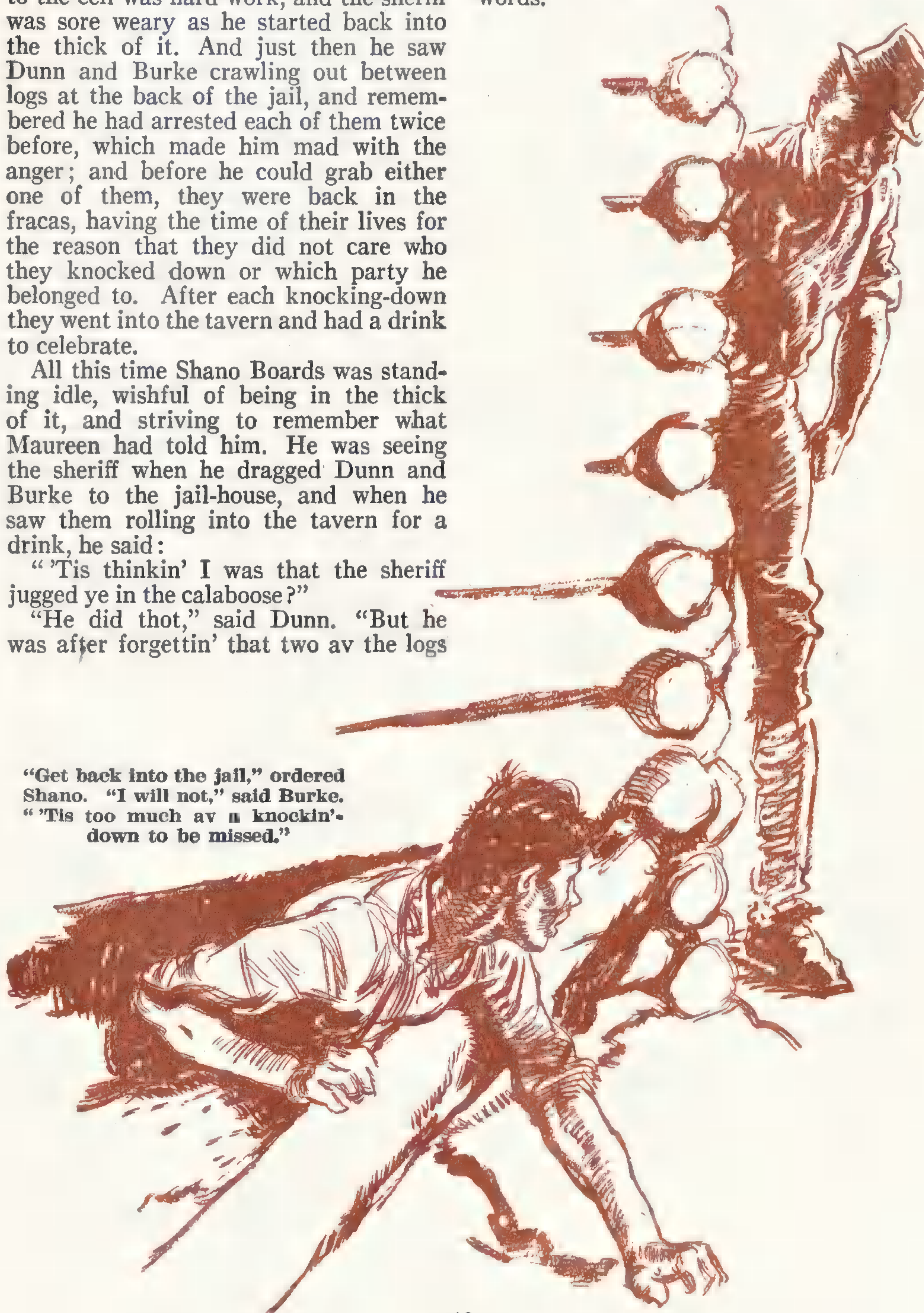
"He did thot," said Dunn. "But he was after forgettin' that two av the logs

at the back are out—so thot, after a bit rest, wan can resume fightin'."

"'Tis onlawful," Shano declared rebukingly. "'Tis a law-abidin' mon I am, and 'tis wrong to break jail."

"Ye broke the jail yerself in Philly-delphy," said Burke.

"I did not," Shano protested. "I but talked me way out—bein' a mon av few words."



"Get back into the jail," ordered Shano. "I will not," said Burke. "'Tis too much av a knockin'-down to be missed."

"Ho-ho!" Shano said.
 "Let's see ye crawl
 out of *thot*!" And
 he dropped Burke
 into the cistern.



"'Tis as wrong as crawlin' from a hole," Dunn argued.

"'Tis onlawful, and I'm thinkin' I'll be after helpin' the sheriff," Shano said.

Shano went to the back of the jail, and the next time the sheriff threw Burke into the jail and Burke started to crawl out, Shano was for stopping him.

"Get back into the jail where ye belong," he ordered.

"I will not," said Burke. "'Tis too much av a knockin'-down to be missed."

"I'm sp'akin' for the sheriff, being a law-abidin' mon," said Shano. "Maureen forbade me joinin' in the knocking, but she said nawthin' forbiddin' me to kape order and help the constabulary. Will ye be after gettin' back in the jail, or will ye force me to push ye back through the hole?"

"'Twill take a better mon than ye to do *thot*," said Burke, hitting Shano on the jaw.

Shano let out a wee whisper of a yell that shook two more logs from the jail wall, and hit Burke in the belly, folding him up completely. Looking around, Shano then saw where workmen had been digging a cistern, twelve feet deep, with a foot of mud and water at the bottom.

"Ho-ho!" he said, lifting Burke on the back of him. "Ho-ho! Let's see ye crawl out of *thot*!"

And with that, he dropped Burke into the cistern. . . .

'Twas a grand time Shano had, helping the sheriff; aye, more joy even than he would have had joining the big knocking-down. Each time the sheriff put one of the fighters into the jail, Shano waited for him to crawl through the hole, then hit him once with his fist to knock him down, and then dropped him into the cistern, each time yelling:

"Ho-ho! Good mon, be after joinin' me friend Burke!"

THE fighting started all over again in the bottom of the cistern, with the Clear Creekers dragging down each New Marketer that tried to climb out on the shoulders of others, and the New Market-ers dragging the Clear Creekers down. In an hour Shano had thrown seventeen

men into the cistern, and feeling the need of a drink, he went into the tavern and found Captain Billy Hill leaning sadly on the bar.

A small man was Captain Billy, and too old for the knocking-down, although he had been a great officer with General Washington.

"'Tis winnin' the fight we'd be," he said, "if it were not thot so many of our Clear Creekers are Quakers and will not fight."

"I'd be pleased to help ye, Captain," said Shano. "But I'm neutral, and besides I promised Maureen to kape out of the knocking-down."

"'Tis thinkin' I am thot thot black eye and that ear were not come by kapin' the peace," said Captain Billy. "And how will ye be after explainin' that to Maureen?"

"'Twill be difficult, but not onpossible," Shano admitted.

"The sheriff is a dommed New Market-er," Captain Billy declared. "'Tis most av my min he has dragged from the knockin'-down. 'Tis onfair."

"I had not counted them," Shano said. "I hov only been knockin' down the on-lawful wans that crawled from the jail. Mayhap I can even up things."

"The Quakers from the creek won't fight," said Captain Billy. "Here is Amri, what could whip the pack av thim if his conscience didn't forbid fightin'."

Amri, a giant of a man, was standing looking sad because, being a Quaker, he would not lift hand against any man in anger.

"We'll be after countin' thim thot I tossed into the cistern," Shano said. He led the way to the cistern, and leaned down to count the prisoners, who were sore weary from fighting in the mud of the pit.

"There are nine Clear Creekers, and seven New Marketers, and four from Hollidays, and the three Irish thot are neutrals, and fightin' for the fun av fightin'," he announced, counting them. "And mayhap two or three sunk in the mud so thot I cannot see thim."

He was bending over, counting, and the big Quaker farmer of a sudden turned to Captain Billy.

"The conscience of me forbids me to lift hand against fellow-man," he said. "But not a word does the church say about feet, and 'tis against injustice."

With that he lifted the big foot of him and kicked Shano down into the cistern. Burke was below, and Shano landed on

the head of him, and Burke went down, the two of them clawing and fighting.

"Ye big omadhaun!" Burke yelled. "Twor ye thot thrun me into this hole." And with that he hit Shano a blow on the chin, and 'twould have knocked Shano down had not Dunn hit him from 'tother side at the same time and stood him up. And then Shano forgot all about promising Maureen he would not fight. 'Twas small room for fighting there was at the bottom of the hole, and Shano was enjoying himself beyond reason. Each time he knocked down one of the onlawful ones, he followed the custom of the day by standing on the belly of his fallen foeman and proclaiming his victory by yelling. For once he loosed the whole power of his banshee shout. Never was there such a sound heard in the wilderness. 'Tis said that when the sound came out of the mouth of the cistern, 'twas like a volcano spouting noise, and that one side of the cistern caved in. The knocking-down stopped, and the fighters ran scattering in all directions to hide in the woods, whilst the clapboard shingles flew in the air.

SHANO lepped on the backs of fallen foes, climbing up until he scrambled from the hole and stood looking about for Amri, intending to even up with the big Quaker for kicking him into the pit. But Captain Billy, who came out of the bar-room to see what was transpiring, caught him.

"Ye wouldn't be after strikin' a man av peace, would ye, Shano Boards?" he asked. "Besides, the knockin'-down is ended, and the matter settled. 'Tis agreed thot the council at Chillicothe shall decide where the new town is to be."

"'Twor a grand knockin'-down," Shano said, wiping the blood from his nose. "And 'tis glad I am thot I kept me pledge with Maureen, and had no part av it, save in presarvin' the peace."

So all the factions gathered in the bar to celebrate the peace, and counted noses. More than one hundred men had been knocked down, and some of them four or five times, so that no one could claim the victory. Shano went home with the three other Irish to Rocky Fork, all of them boasting how they had remained neutral; and the next day he went home to Maureen, who said she never had expected that he could keep out of a fight when one was going on, any more than he could keep sober when drink was to be had, and asked where the salt was



"The Injuns are nawthin' but sun-burnt Irishmen thot hov run wild."

to cure the meat. Shano had forgotten entirely, and all that saved him from the broom-handle was that Burke came by with his ox-cart, loaded with salt that Shano had bought and forgot.

WHEN the legislature met over at Chillicothe, it was voted that the new town should be built at the highest point of the land between Clear Creek and Rocky Creek and Rocky Fork—with the crossing of two survey lines as the point marked. The plan pleased Captain Billy Hill mightily.

"'Twill be half on your land, and half on mine, Amos," he told Amos Evans. "'Twill be a town greater than Chillicothe, and we'll lay it out on the hillside looking down on the great meadow where the muster is held."

Captain Billy and Amos Evans went ahead with the plans for the town, and all the time Shano was at home, fattening his pigs on the mash and on the pigeons, and smoking the hams and bacon and building a great chimney of stone for his cabin, to make it the warmest and best in the hills. 'Twas a fine winter, with the still dripping away in the cave,

and his friends Burke and Dunn and Fullerton coming to help empty the jug, and recall the great knocking-down and sing the old songs of Erin—till Maureen drove them out on their way home, or helped Shano lift them into the bed in the leanto. Shano was a happy man, and when his friends started homeward through the great forest, he lifted the voice of him and howled until all the creatures in the woods hid and the forest was safe for the journey.

Naught did Shano know of the new town until one day General Massie came to mark the spot and direct the survey of the. Captain Billy had sent for the General and for General Duncan McArthur, his friend, to lay out the new town. As he came through the woods riding a big horse, Shano Boards, being joyful with the spring weather and a new run from the still, felt the call on him to make a noise, and lifted the voice of him.

"By the sound of it, 'tis that wild Irish banshee Shano Boards," said the General, stopping his horse. "Never was there so great a voice in all the world. 'Tis pleased to see him I'll be."

Shano, hearing the surveyors coming, ran and threw the big arms of him around the General in greeting.

"'Tis honored I am to see ye, Ginerall darlint," he said. "Be stoppin' with me, and ye'll no be after slapin' in the snow—and I hov for ye as foine a nip of usquebaugh as iver tongue av mon greeted."

"'Tis nothin' I'd like better, Shano Boards," said the General. "But I've promised I'll start the surveyin' of the new town for Captain Billy Hill."

"Mayhap ye can stop by on the way back, thin," said Shano. "'Tis a foine spot thot I hear Captain Billy picked by the meadow and the creek near by."

"Creek?" said the General. "Creeks do not flow over hills, and the law says that it shall be on the high ground."

With that he went down through the forest to the branch, and up the risen ground to Captain Billy's meadow, and Captain Billy greeted him joyously, and told him the plan for the new town. 'Twas to be laid out as Philadelphia was, with two wide streets and a square for the courthouse where they met.

General Massie looked at the plan and at his maps, and he shut one eye of him and squinted toward the forest to the south. Then he set up his instrument and sighted through it.

"'Tis a wee mistake you've made, Captain Billy," he said. "The high land

lies on the hills two miles to the south. 'Tis there the law says the town is to be."

The folk from New Market, that had not wanted to move, roared and laughed and slapped each other on the back, so pleased they were that the Clear Creekers should not have the town on their lands. And General Massie sent the surveyors to the new place to run the lines through great forests and mark off the squares. They were hard at work, when Shano Boards came chasing a pig from his cabin and stopped to watch them.

"And what be ye after doing here?" he asked.

"'Tis the new county town," they said.

SHANO was fair stunned the moment, then he lifted the great voice of him in a bellow of joy that came near toppling the half-cut trees.

"'Tis a rich mon I am," he shouted. "'Tis a whole town I'm after ownin'. Maureen shall hov a castle now. 'Tis a celebration we'll be after havin'."

With that he ran to his still and filled all the jugs; and when General Massie came the next day, not a tree was down nor a line run. The jugs were nigh about empty, and everyone enjoying himself, singing or fighting.

"Welcome to me new town!" shouted Shano, seeing the General. "'Tis thinkin' I am it'll be called Boardstown unless mayhap Maureen finds a name for it."

"Your town?" asked the General.

"Sure, 'tis my town," Shano answered, bold-like. "Isn't it on me land? 'Tis thinkin' I am thot I'll be buildin' Maureen's castle right here."

The General unrolled his maps and looked at them.

"'Twill be called Hillsboro, for Captain Billy Hill," he answered. "And because it sits on nine hills, which is two more than Rome had."

"But 'tis me land, and Boardstown it should be," Shano argued.

"That it is not," said the General, pointing to the map. "Look, and ye'll be after seein' that your land lies four mile up the creek, as I told ye plainly before you settled here."

"Wurra! Wurra! Wurra!" Shano moaned. "'Tis no town, and no castle, and not aven a wee bit av a cabin I'll be after havin' for Maureen. Sure, and she'll be after takin' the broom to me whin she hears the word!"

He drank his last drop from a jug.

Mr. Fullerton will offer "Big Chief Banshee," another story of the wild Irish on the frontier, in an early issue.



"'Tis Maureen, come to be the wife of me!"

"Well, aisy come, aisy go. I still hov Maureen and the childer and the pigs."

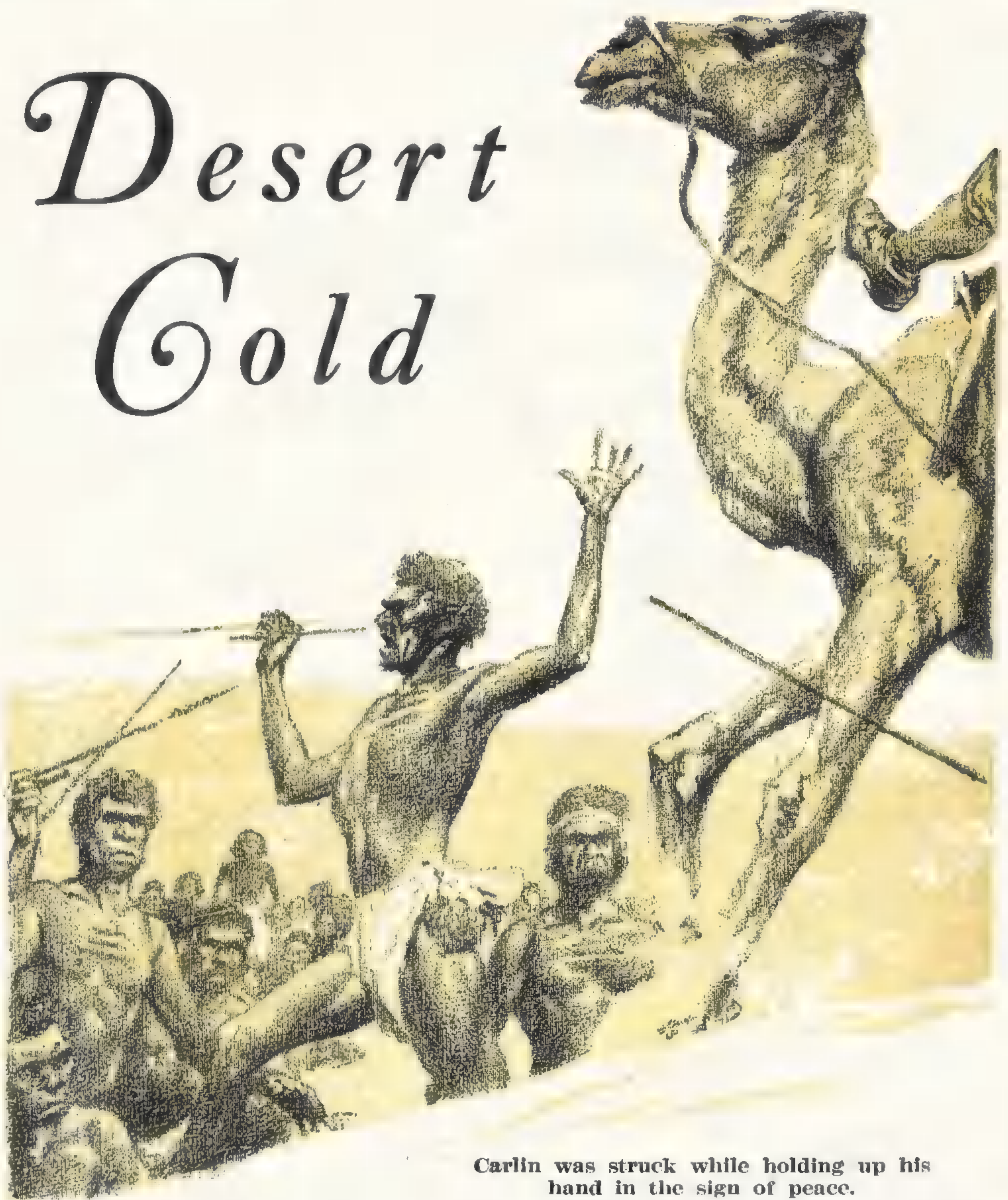
"Don't be after takin' it hard, Shano," said the General. "We'll be after buildin' ye a fine cabin—little enough pay that will be for the work ye've done hereabouts, clearin' the land."

AND thot," said Timmy Costigan, relighting his pipe and glancing suggestively toward his empty tin cup, "was how me gran'ther Shano Boards moved the town and brought the courthouse here. Sure, and 'twas him thot carried a hod whin this courthouse was built, instead of bein' the owner. He wor a good hod-carrier—not a fancy hod-carrier, but a good wan."

"And did he ever build Maureen the castle he promised her?" I asked.

"Thot he did not," said Timmy solemnly. "Faith, and if he had, there'd be a statue av him here in the square, and I'd be takin' me ease, instid of bein' janitor. And will ye be tiltin' the jug? 'Tis dhry me throat is, with the talkin', and me a mon av few words."

Desert Gold



Carlin was struck while holding up his hand in the sign of peace.

THERE are ten months of heat in Central Australia and only two of cold; and so it is easy for the few white men who find their living there to forget the winter's need. Sometimes even the blacks forget. That was why the sheepman, Carlin, and his helper, the seventeen-year-old Lint, were out far from home in the bitter wind, under the gray winter sky.

Each rode a camel, and four pack-camels were in tow behind. It seemed funny, Lint thought, to be riding camels when there was water in the clay holes, and horses could have crossed the desert; but Carlin's horses were sore-footed from gathering stock on ironstone country and could not be used for packing a heavy load. A camel is tough enough for sharp

ironstone country or any other—years ago they introduced the breed to the desolate Australian interior when all other means of transport had failed; but the trouble with camels is that they think more than horses do. Lint knew the thought that was behind their malignant eyes. They were thinking that somewhere along the trail somebody would get careless, and they could break from the nose-lines and stretch it for a warm spot in the sand-hills. They were given a bad temper by nature, and the cold put an edge to it. . . .

"I picked a man up right around here once," Carlin said. "He was dead from heat. It wasn't thirst, because he had water on his camel. He'd camped to make a meal, and there was corn-tack



The able author of "Walk to Glory," and "Red Fog," gives us another vivid story of the Australian wilderness.

By LOUIS KAYE

spread out on his plate, untouched, because even the damn' crows and the dingo dogs weren't stirring in that heat. It was like a blast furnace that day, but silent and heavy, like a weight on your shoulders that you couldn't lift off. I guess he'd just sat and looked at the corn-tack, knowing he should eat it, but not able to move a finger, and then finally toppled over."

"It's hard to think it'll ever get hot again," Lint said. "Seems colder now than it was yesterday."

COLD under a slate sky, with not a break or a light patch in it. They were not rain-clouds but a great blanket of dry-weather clouds woven tightly together and never appearing to move. The

constant wind came close along the ground, whipping thin, dry air in icy invisible tentacles into the heat-thinned blood. Lint rubbed the back of one hand across his moistured nose, pulled the brim of his American sombrero down over his smarting eyes and huddled deeper into his coat.

He was well armed against the cold now; but a few months ago he could not have withstood it. There had been nothing on his back then but a shirt and a pair of old dungarees, and scant flesh on his body. Carlin had taken him in and given him a job on the sheep-station; and Mrs. Carlin had given him more—a home. His frame had filled out solid and firm with her good cooking, enough so that he could fit into Carlin's spare



"Kill the white whelp!" Nakobi shouted. "He is one, and we are many! Kill, kill!"

clothes; better than that, his face had lost the look of scorn and fear that the unwanted wear. He would never forget the day he had come to Carlin's station, his tired legs scuffing the dirt, his stomach empty as his pockets, and no idea in his head where to go next if these people turned him away. "All right, son," the tall sheep-man had said, his gray eyes sizing him up, not waiting for him to speak. "Hop around to the kitchen and fill the wrinkles out. There'll be time enough then to hear what you've got to say."

Lint might have imagined a man like Carlin, but he had never before known one. A woman like Mrs. Carlin was beyond even his imagining. Sometimes in her presence he was afraid, for he would think of himself as he had been before, ragged and furtive, picking up scraps where they fell, stealing and running like a mongrel, which indeed he was, with no last name, and no idea, even, of how he'd got his first one; and he would feel that he had no business here, and that some day she would see it, suddenly, and the door would be closed. Kindness could never last so long.

CARLIN'S voice carried back on the wind again:

"There's a lot of things wrong with this country, Lint, but the biggest thing's the weather. If you're not sweating, you're freezing. It's bad both ways; but

if I could change it, I guess I'd make the cold last longer. Then through the hot months you'd remember it was coming, instead of forgetting, and you'd be ready for it."

That was like Carlin, Lint thought. There was no bitterness in what he said, although he was not the one who had forgotten. With Lint, he had stocked the woodshed full for the winter in weeks of hard, patient work, scavenging far and wide; for if ever he had reason to dread the cold, he had it now. Warmth would be triply precious this year; sometime soon, perhaps at the time of greatest cold, the Carlins' child would be born.

THEN, during what they had thought would be their last trip out from home for wood, a raiding party of desert blacks had come by in the early dawn. Mrs. Carlin, alone in the house except for old Mary, could do nothing to stop the raid. The blacks took all the fuel they could carry. That was most of it. What was left would last for no more than eight or nine days, and only that long with scrimping.

"I'll go after them," Lint had said. "You'll be wanting to stay here."

"And what would you do if you caught them?" Carlin had asked, with a flicker in his gray eyes.

"Why, make 'em hand the wood back to me, and pack it on the camels and get it here."

Carlin's drawn face had relaxed in a smile. "I know you'd try, son, but you'd end up with a spear through you, or a boomerang smashing your head open. They're desperate for wood just as much as we are. More than that, there's some hot-blooded buck at the head of this party spurring them on; there must be, because otherwise they wouldn't have raided. The blacks around here know me, and they know I'd have given them as much as I could for the asking." He shook his head. "A bad 'un like that wouldn't worry about killing one white man, but he'd think twice before he tried to kill two. We can't afford to take any chances, so we'll trek out together."

Lint had heard him saying good-by to Mrs. Carlin. "They won't be traveling fast in this cold; we'll overhaul them soon. We'll be back before you'll know we've left. But if the young 'un should show up before—"

"I'll be all right, Harry. Old Mary knows how to help me." She had paused. "Take care of Lint," she said.

Mile on mile the grumbling camels had plodded, and all the country was the same—low red rises, and red or yellow sand ridges, no growth but saltbush, reaching the camels' bellies when they waded through a patch. You could make a fire with saltbush when it was dry, but it burned out so fast you could not keep it going, no matter how rapidly you gathered and fed. Two pictures shifted before Lint's eyes: one of the house behind and Mrs. Carlin waiting inside, the other of huge red leaping flames, the crackle and spark-shower of good firm dry wood burning. He thought of it as a starving man thinks of meat.

Without a sun to measure the day's passing, the night swept on them unexpectedly and sooner than it seemed due. They were halfway across a *gibber* plain, which is a flat stretch of ironstone shingle.

"So we get caught out on the stones," said Carlin, using the idiom of the country for that sort of desert, more disliked than the sand. "Tough luck, but it's too dark to go on."

Lint, dismounted, could see the camel he had ridden but none of the others. He helped unsaddle. The camel-saddles were big and clumsy, but that was all to the good on such a night as this. Stacked on the ground, they formed a windbreak.

"Hobble and picket too, Lint," Carlin said. "There's nothing for them to eat if they're let off the picket-lines, but they might stray, looking for it, or make a dash for some place warm." He lit a cigarette, and his face leaped transiently out of the dark, a thin and worried face. Lint could think of nothing to say. It was cheerless enough when it was light; the dark made it worse. Lint knew what was on his mind. Not any worry about overhauling the blacks, for that was certain; their trail was too clear in the frosted sand for even a greenhorn to miss. It was what would happen then.

They had their cold supper, and Lint went to sleep at last, huddled in his coat and blanket. He stirred restlessly during the night, seeking for warmth, for there was none in his body, nor in Carlin's, lying next to him. Then unaccountably he was comfortable, and did not move again until dawn.

WHEN he opened his eyes, he saw Carlin walking up and down, a bandanna around his neck, and his coat hugged tight to him; and Lint saw why he had suddenly felt warm in the night.

"Hey," he said accusingly, "what's the idea of giving me your blanket?"

"I didn't need it," Carlin asserted. "I couldn't sleep, anyway. Shake a leg, son, and help saddle. We'll breakfast as we ride. We've got to catch that outfit today."

They were moving quickly, riding north of west, almost straight into the searching wind. An hour later they were off the *gibber* flat and had picked up the tribe's foot-tracks again. Carlin peered down from his swaying seat.

"More and more of 'em. Bands joining up, it looks like. I guess they were scattered out in hunting parties, and now that they've got a supply of wood, they're coming together."

IT was nearly noon when a thin line of smoke showed on the horizon. Neither spoke, but the same compulsion sent their bodies leaning forward, as if to stretch over the distance between. It was a shock to Lint when he heard the let-down in Carlin's voice.

"No one there. The tribe's gone already."

Five minutes later he spoke again.

"There *is* someone there."

Lint's eyes had picked it out too. "Wood!" he cried. "Look—a whole big pile of it! They've left it for us!"

"They haven't left it for *us*," Carlin said, and the sound of the words was dull and empty. . . .

Two old blacks were crouched beside the fire, a man and a woman. The woman's emaciated body, clad only in the remnants of a blue *naja*, was hunched over as she stared apathetically into the blaze, and she did not bother to look up as the whites drew near. The man, as wrinkled as she, but without a shred of clothing, stared out of watery eyes at Carlin and answered his question about the tribe in a thin, uncertain voice.

"All black feller pull away this place now," he said. "Old feller die when fire go out."

"What's he mean?" Lint asked.

Carlin's face was weary. "It's the custom. When the old grow too weak to keep up with the tribe, they're left to die. If it's winter, they build a fire for them—if they have wood—and give them fuel to keep it burning for a while. When the fire goes out—well, they go out too. You recognize that wood, Lint?"

"I guess I should," Lint said. "You and I gathered it."

"That's right. There's a ton of it at least." He spoke slowly, as if thinking of other things. "Something damn' queer about this, son."

He did not say what it was, but was silent while Lint stared at the piled wood. A ton of wood, a whole ton! It was not all that they had lost, but it was enough; it would see them through. In half an hour they could have it slung to the camels in the rope loading-nets, and be back toward home.

But Carlin was speaking to the old man.

"You needn't be worrying. We won't take the wood from you."

AT first the words meant nothing to Lint; then the meaning got through, and with it he saw that picture again, of Mrs. Carlin waiting, and the cold wind whining around the house, and the little stock of fuel dwindling as the gray hours passed. His anger welled up suddenly.

"We've got to take it! It's ours, isn't it? They stole it from us, didn't they?"

"We can't take from the old and dying," Carlin said. Lint stared at him. The furious unbelieving words on his lips died back, and he swallowed as if to swallow them, and then shivered in the cold wind and wiped his hand across his eyes, and found the fingers wet.

There was a silence. Lint saw Carlin's eyes shift from the wood to the bleak horizon, and he saw his bowed shoulders straighten, and heard the indomitable will in his voice.

"We'll get it somewhere. Come on, son—"

Even as the camels moved, the old man on the ground spoke again.

"You good feller," he said. "All black feller not pull away this place. Nakobi, he bad feller, he tell black feller wait, white feller go away."

Carlin's face was alight.

"Nakobi—so it's Nakobi!"

"Black feller, they over there—"

"I see it!" Carlin cried. "That's not all the wood they've got, not by a long shot! I'll bet my life on it!"

He jerked the lead camel ahead, and they went jogging down a ridge and up a higher one; and then they were pausing on the crest of it and looking at the sight it revealed.

At the bottom of the long slow slope, well out of view from where the two old people lay, the rest of the blacks were gathered, two hundred or more of them, camped by a sand-blow.

"That big one," Carlin said, "that's Nakobi. He's a bad 'un. Keep your eyes sharp, Lint, but keep behind me."

Grumbling, the camels pitched down the slope.

To look at, Nakobi was a Stone Age man come back to life, with the strong wide jaws, the thick, short neck, the flat nose and the big overhanging brows. His chest was broad and marked deeply with the scarifications of the warrior.

"Why do you come here, white man?" he said, as the file of camels halted. He spoke in the native, a smattering of which Lint knew. "What do you want to take from us? It cannot be water, for the holes are full and the weather is cold."

"You know why I have followed you," Carlin said, speaking with sureness in the same tongue. "You have taken wood that is not yours. I have come to take some of it back."

"We have no wood, white man. We have no wood except that left for the old ones."

"A great pile indeed," Carlin agreed. "I have never seen so much wood left with those about to die." His voice grew harder. "Did you leave so much because you knew I would not take it from the old? Did you think I would see the old dying by their fire, and believe it to be all the wood you had, and go away? And then did you expect to use the wood of the old yourself?"

Looking past Carlin from his mount in the rear, Lint saw the muscles move in Nakobi's face, and knew that Carlin had shot straight and true. He could see the quick startled thoughts behind Nakobi's eyes, and he knew that when the warrior next spoke, he lied.

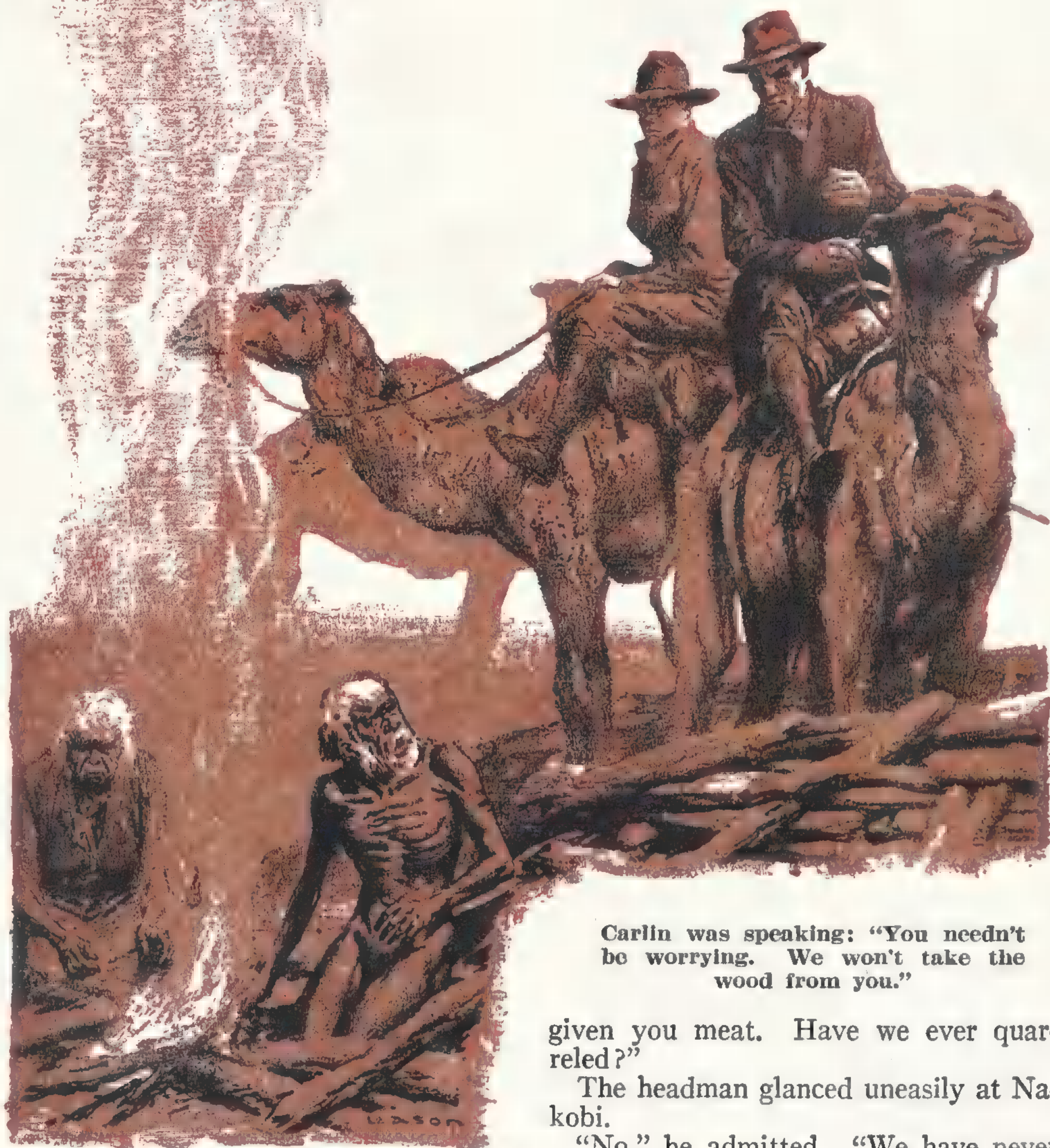
"We had no thought of going back, white man. We go on to where we can make fires without robbing the old. That is a thing we leave to the white man."

"No," Carlin said. "You thought that we would go away. That is not all the wood you have, Nakobi. You have carried more with you from where you left the old ones. I saw splinters of bark on your trail here." His voice cracked. "There is plenty for both of us. Where is the rest of the wood hidden?"

IT was plain to see the anger in Nakobi's face, spreading down through his body, quivering in his thighs. His voice ran out between bared teeth.

"You'll take none of it, white man! This is our country, and all that is in it

Illustrated by the Australian artist
Percy Leason



Carlin was speaking: "You needn't be worrying. We won't take the wood from you."

given you meat. Have we ever quarreled?"

The headman glanced uneasily at Nakobi.

"No," he admitted. "We have never quarreled."

"Was the meat I gave you good?" Carlin persisted.

"Yes. Yes, the meat you gave us was good."

"Then why do we quarrel now? Why do you let your young spearmen listen to Nakobi? It is only a share of my own firewood that I come for. There will be enough left for you and for your old. And your people can march on to a place where the wood grows; but I cannot move my house there. I must bring wood to my house."

is ours—the water in the holes, and the kangaroo on the plains, and the wood for the fires to keep our bodies warm. You are not talking to a tame dog now; you are talking to a man and a warrior who leads other warriors. Go away, white man, while you are still able to go!"

"I cannot go without wood," Carlin said. His eyes raised beyond Nakobi and singled out an older man. "You, headman!" he said. "You know me. When the hunger has been with your people, and you have come to me, I have

Lint thought he could see the headman torn in two ways, feeling friendship for Carlin but fear of Nakobi.

"It is true," he conceded at last in a low voice. "The house cannot be moved to where wood grows."

"Never will the wood go to the white man's house!" shouted Nakobi. He ignored the headman, crying the words to the young warriors close to him, and they stamped their bare feet and rattled their weapons at the flame of his voice. "Always the old people have ruled, and always they have had blood like water, and no courage in their hearts! So the white man has ridden over us on his camel or his horse, and so it is time for a young man to talk and lead the way! Of what are we afraid? The white men are strong in their big camps, but in their little camps they are weak. Where the kangaroo leaps and the dingo stalks, it is we who are strong—we! No wood! There is no wood for the white man!"

IT was coming now; Lint could feel it coming.

"Look out!"

He yelled and plucked his rifle from his saddle-boot in the same instant. A warrior's arm had jerked back for a boomerang cast. Lint fired but missed, and a woman screamed.

"See!" Nakobi roared. "They shoot our women! Kill, *kill!*"

It did not matter that the woman had not been touched, for the scream served as well. And now the camels' nervous hitching around obscured Lint's range of fire, and Carlin had held his own fire all too long. He was struck while holding up his hand in the sign of peace, a spear whipping glancingly off his thigh, and a boomerang slashing his forehead. His body jumped, turned, and fell heavily to the ground in a stream of blood.

Lint pitched out of the saddle. There was a deadly fear in his brain, and it was as if unseen fingers were plucking at him, pulling him back, pulling him away, while the thin wailing voice of fear told him that all was lost and that he must run for his own life. His face was contorted as with a great wrenching effort he raised the rifle and fired blindly. He was gasping as he did so. He fired until the magazine was empty; and it was only then that clear sight came back to him, and he saw that the spearmen's rush had halted and broken, and that they had run. They were clustered in an angry mass a hundred feet or so away; and even as he

stared at them, he saw a spear-arm poised for throwing. He grabbed Carlin's rifle, lying at his side, and fired, and the weapon hit the ground.

"Kill the white whelp!" Nakobi shouted. "He is one, and we are many! Kill, *kill!*"

But none would move first. There was a lull, while Lint sobbed for air; the crushing weight was around his chest again as he saw what faced him.

Sand grated beneath the camels' feet; they pitched back and forth, their long necks twisting; they were nervous and frightened and feeling for a break in the nose-lines. Fortunately Carlin's body had fallen over the lead, holding it tight, but it would not need much pressure to pull it loose. And Lint could not move to take it in his hand. His eyes were fixed glassily on the cluster of spearmen, and he knew that it could not go on, not like this, not with Nakobi jeering at them, berating their weak hearts, calling for a massed rush in a shower of boomerangs and spears. The weight of the fear was like an iron band, and he felt the horrible sense of aloneness and helplessness, all of him frozen cold, unable to shoot, unable to as much as shift one finger. The stock of the rifle seemed to burn in his grasp, and he wanted to drop it from him and collapse in the sand, beaten, useless.

Useless, useless: that was the knowledge he had always had, the thing he had feared Mrs. Carlin would see one day, see through him and see the mongrel fear. Pick up a scrap and run; that was his way. She must have known it, he thought. "Take care of Lint," she had said to Carlin; those were the last words she had said.

Now Carlin lay bleeding and unconscious in the sand. The life was ebbing from him; perhaps it had gone already. All the strength and courage that were in that tall body meant nothing now, nor the woman waiting for him, nor the child soon to be his. And Lint shuddered, thinking of her.

He saw her face and her eyes. He seemed to see her lips moving. With no consciousness of anything else he listened, and he seemed to hear her saying that she understood the fear in him, and forgave him.

WITH that secret knowledge, suddenly Lint found it possible to rise from his frozen crouch. Suddenly his body was light and easy and fluid. He

could have run, and he felt that no one could have caught him. But he no longer wished to run. Instead, he looked at Nakobi and the spearmen with scorn, and holding the rifle steady in firing position he walked toward them.

They hesitated. A spear-arm flexed; a boomerang swung back for the throw. Lint marched on. Then Nakobi was shrieking his anger, and the warriors were fading in retreat, and they did not halt again until they were well beyond spear-range.

LINT showed them his back and returned to the camels. He dropped to his knees and examined Carlin.

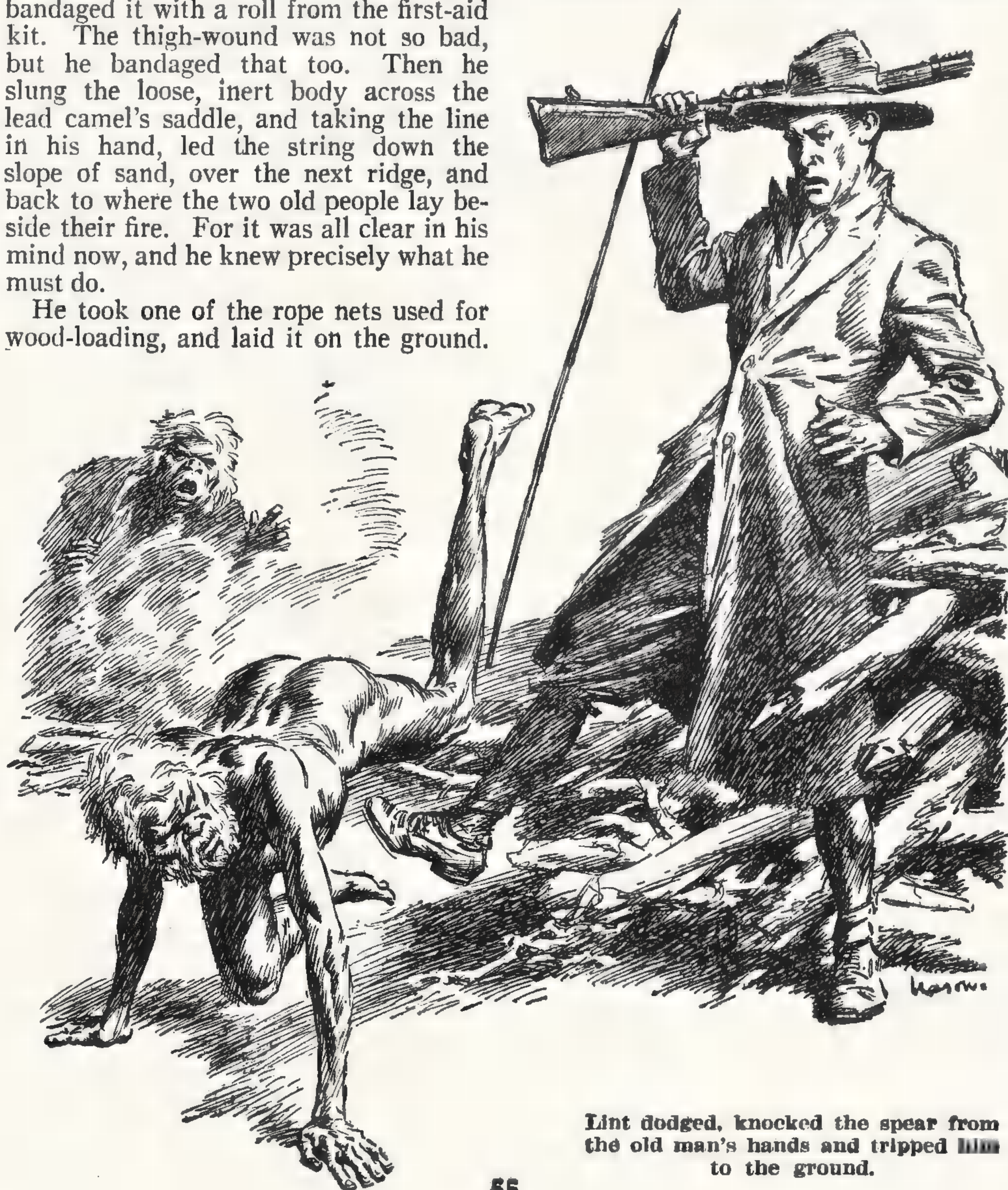
The sheep-man was alive, at least. Lint washed out the deep head-wound and bandaged it with a roll from the first-aid kit. The thigh-wound was not so bad, but he bandaged that too. Then he slung the loose, inert body across the lead camel's saddle, and taking the line in his hand, led the string down the slope of sand, over the next ridge, and back to where the two old people lay beside their fire. For it was all clear in his mind now, and he knew precisely what he must do.

He took one of the rope nets used for wood-loading, and laid it on the ground.

Pulling Carlin down, he tied it firmly over him, and then hoisted the securely bound bundle to one side of his kneeling camel. Then he spread out the other rope nets and started loading wood from the stack by the fire.

He heard the old man cursing at him and the woman's thin screaming as they realized what he was doing, but he hardly looked at them. He did not pause until a hiss of air past his cheek made him dodge and turn to see a spear-pole quivering in the sand—a long, shrewd cast that had come within scant inches of transfixing him. Grabbing the rifle, he crouched and fired at the group of warriors who had worked up silently; and with a rush they scattered.

Nakobi's voice came back on the wind:



Lint dodged, knocked the spear from the old man's hands and tripped him to the ground.

"The white whelp robs the dying old ones of their fire! Kill him! Why make your fighting spears and boomerangs if you never use them? Kill, *kill!*"

In answer, Lint put a shot at his feet. Nakobi fell full length. He was not hurt, for he came scrambling up, sputtering sand and yelling, hurled his own spear wildly, and ran like the rest.

Lint turned to discover the old black coming at him with the spear that had signaled the attack. He dodged, knocked the spear from the old man's hands, and tripped him to the ground. The woman shrieked without pause as he bound him.

He continued loading the wood.

When he was finished, he stood for a few moments leaning against a camel. He had worked at such tension and speed that the reaction left him nauseated. He stared vacantly at the fire, now dying in smoke, the slivers of wood and bark where the pile of wood had been, and at the old man who tugged at the ropes binding him, and who bared his froth-flecked blackened teeth like an animal. The woman had given up her screaming, and now she crept closer to the fire and bent over it in the smoke, as if to suck from it the last warmth.

"It was the only thing to do, see," Lint said to Carlin, who could not hear him. "We had to come back with wood—you know that. Maybe we won't get there, anyway, but we've got it."

THE night was solid when Carlin spoke from the side of the camel that carried him.

"Where are we, Lint?" he said clearly.

"Heading in," Lint said. "I got you slung with packs the other side that camel's hump. Are you riding easy?"

"Easy enough, son," Carlin said. "Was it a boomerang that got me?"

Lint told him how it had happened. "A spear nicked you too, but it was the slice in the head that had me worried."

"I guess I'm all right, except for a thumping headache," Carlin said. "Where are the blacks? Following?"

"Maybe," Lint said. "I don't know. I was hoping they've quit. We've come a good stretch, and they were in sight till dark. There's not many cartridges left."

"You stood them off by yourself," Carlin said wonderingly.

"That wasn't much." Lint cleared his throat. "It was the wood that was the trouble."

It clicked in the sheep-man's brain, then. "The wood!" he exclaimed. "Lint,

we've got to get it! We can't come home empty!"

"We're not empty," Lint said. "I got those pack-camels loaded with all they can carry."

"But crikey, son—you didn't find it by yourself, did you? The wood Nakobi had hidden?"

"No," Lint said.

CARLIN was silent a long time. He said at last:

"You took it from the old people."

"I did," Lint said. "I didn't know if you'd be sore or not, or what you would have done. But I knew you had to have wood; even after the boomerang knocked you out, your face was set sort of determined, as if you weren't giving up, even unconscious. Just like as if in your sleep you still knew you had to have wood."

The file of camels jogged ahead, faster, it seemed, than they had come on the trek out; perhaps because the wind was behind them now, and not biting in from the front; perhaps because they knew they were on the trail home. The wind wasn't so bad, behind, even if it was cold; almost like the wind that lifts a sailing-ship on, Lint had been thinking, filling the sails tight and carrying the great hull on wings to the home port. And never did a ship come home, he had been thinking, with a cargo half so precious.

"I guess you had to do it," Carlin said slowly. "But it's not going to be good to remember. We'll remember it a long time, too, robbing those old ones and leaving them in the cold."

"It came to me all of a sudden—see," Lint said. "I guess maybe because I was thinking of her, waiting for you back there, and not seeing you the way I could see you, lying on the sand with your head smashed in. I was thinking of her, and thinking of you, and the kind of a man you were, and the things you can do and the things you can't."

"We had to have it," Carlin said. "I know, I know."

The boy's head turned back; cold and pinched as his lips were, his smile could almost be seen through the darkness.

"You don't have to tell me that to try and make me feel better," he said. "I'm feeling fine. I knew you couldn't take it from them, and I knew she wouldn't want wood like that, anyway. So those old people will have their fire all right." He gestured with his thumb to the camel last in file. "See—I brought them too!"



Tiny David deals with a ferocious member of the deadlier sex.

By ROBERT MILL

Lady on the Warpath

THE men of the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police, in common with most citizens of the United States, found one topic dominating their thoughts and their conversations: the war.

From the radio in the living-room of the barracks there came an almost constant stream of news-bulletins, and Lieutenant James Crosby, listening, frowned thoughtfully as his thoughts took flight back over the years:

A company of United States Marines had charged toward a narrow bridge across the Marne. Hidden machine-guns coughed. One by one their officers fell. The line wavered. Then a big overgrown kid wearing the chevrons of a corporal sprinted forward.

"Come on, you guys!" he called over his shoulder. "Think you're too good to die?"

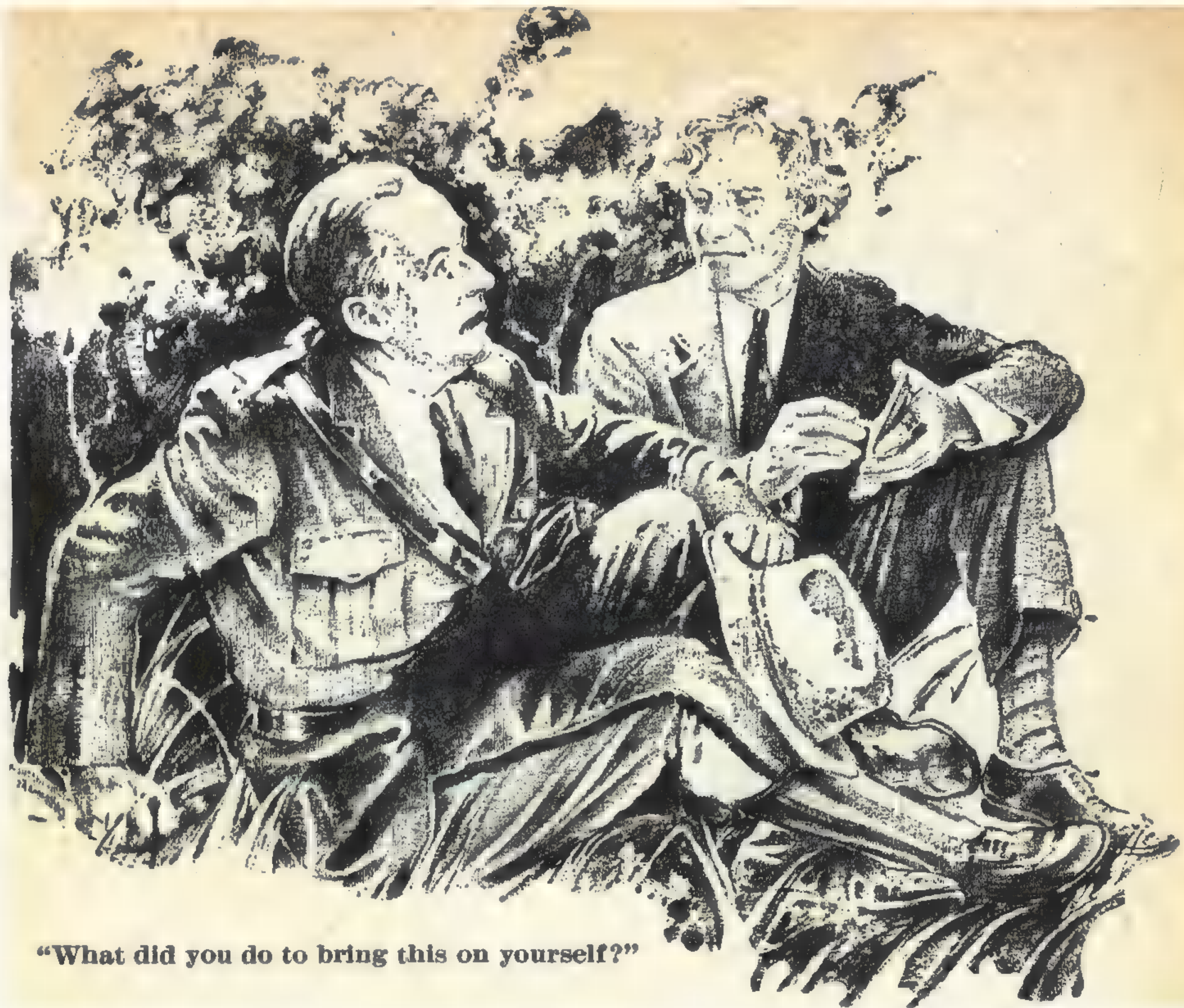
They had followed him, of course. When he fell, they picked him up, and they saw to it that he was the first man across the bridge. Later it had been nip and tuck in a base hospital. . . . Until a few weeks ago, all that had seemed very remote. But now it was both close and vivid as Crosby turned to the man who had figured in that scene.

"Think it will have to be done again, Tiny?"

Lieutenant Edward David absent-mindedly fingered a bit of ribbon attached to his tunic.

"I don't know, Jim. I am afraid so, though. Looks bad, doesn't it?"

Crosby nodded assent. "It does." He leaned forward. "Say, aren't we going to cut ourselves in on the party?" His grin was apologetic. "When you hear what is going on over there, playing cop seems a bit trivial."



"What did you do to bring this on yourself?"

Tiny David lowered his voice:

"I propositioned some friends of mine in Canada. But it isn't men they need. The best thing we can do is sit tight for a while. We may get plenty of chance to jump in, and with our old outfit."

"**D**OING what?" came the harsh question.

They looked up to find Captain Charles Field, commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop, standing before them.

"Modern war," Captain Field continued, "calls for specialists. Can you birds fly an airplane? Can you drive a tank?" He cupped a hand over an ear. "I don't seem to hear any affirmative votes. And by the same token, it is a lot easier to train youngsters than to bother with tough eggs who have gone through one war, and put in years of soldiering in a police uniform."

"Yes sir," Tiny David admitted. "Age will be a handicap. But Jim and I are still inside the limit. Of course, I can understand why the Captain might have a bit of trouble—"

"Humph!" snorted Captain Field. "It might interest you to know that a friend of mine in the War Department wrote me that while there was nothing for me right at this time, he would keep my—"

The commanding officer turned to face a man who approached the group. "Yes, Max."

"If it please the Captain," said Max Payton, the top-sergeant, "he is wanted on the telephone." Mr. Payton's face brightened as he added the information: "Mrs. Brece-Carmedy is calling. She says it is very important."

Mr. Crosby groaned hollowly as Captain Field and Payton departed.

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy is bad news. The Skipper has a little habit of passing on his bad news to the lesser help. You certainly have made us eligible."

"How?" Tiny David demanded.

Mr. Crosby sighed with resignation.

"You have been out in the field so long you are away back on barracks gossip. About three weeks ago the Skipper wrote the War Department. He told them that if the worst came to the worst—and everything seemed to be headed that way—he was ready to take up right where he left off the last time, and in any capacity. He drew a nice letter of thanks, and the sad information that he was doing too much flirting with the fifty-year mark. Naturally, that burned him up. Then you had to go and rub salt on the cut."

Mr. Crosby glanced about.

"My woman's intuition tells me this is a good time to get out of here. You are strong and brave. Why don't you wait and see what happens? But when Mrs. Crosby's boy pulls a horse's tail three times, and gets kicked three times, he knows that the horse doesn't like to have his tail pulled. That's one advantage of a good education. So long, Retarded Mentality."

MR. DAVID was deep in a magazine when Captain Field returned, his face beaming, and his voice cheerful.

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy has had a great idea," declared the Captain.

"She did, sir?" Tiny David realized Mr. Crosby had made no mistake, but retreat was no longer a possibility.

"Yes, indeed," Captain Field continued. "She is disgusted with the slow progress our public officials are making along the lines of preparedness. She believes the time has come when representative citizens should take things into their own hands."

Mr. David's only contribution was silence, but Captain Field needed no encouragement.

"She has formed a group of women defenders of home and fireside. This group is very much upper-bracket, carefully restricted to only the most wealthy and most social among our summer visitors. Every gal provides her own rifle, and what-not. She calls her group the Lake Serene Parashootists. If we ever enter the war, and if we are invaded, the gals will be all ready to deal with parachute troops."

By this time Mr. David's worst fears were realized.

Captain Field warmed to his subject:

"Some people might say that Mrs. Brece-Carmedy is a bit hysterical. Others might call her a publicity-hound. Unkind critics might even point out that last summer she devoted her talents to an attempt to ban the wearing of horts on the streets of Lake Serene. At that time I believe you made a bum wise-crack to the effect that if she ever squeezed into a pair of 'em, they would be wides, not shorts. For your sake I hope Mrs. Brece-Carmedy didn't hear about that remark."

"For my sake, sir?" Mr. David's question was designed to bring the worst into the open.

"For your sake," Captain Field repeated firmly. "You are going to see a lot of Mrs. Brece-Carmedy this summer."

Mr. David fought back the desire to say that there was a lot of the lady to see, and resigned himself to the fact that Captain Field was enjoying all this and would prolong it as much as possible.

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy," the commanding officer continued, "invited me to undertake the training of the ladies under her command. She is particularly anxious that they receive instruction in the use of rifles. Naturally, I was considerably flattered by the invitation."

Captain Field paused expectantly; and Mr. David, knowing all was lost, could not resist the temptation.

"This is one time the old dame used headwork. The Captain is the ideal man for that job."

Captain Field shook his head regretfully.

"That was the way I felt—at first. Then, fortunately, I remembered our conversation of a few minutes ago. As you so kindly pointed out, I am a bit old for that sort of thing. That was why I put personal pleasure and ambition aside, and yielded to a younger and more efficient man."

"But Mrs. Brece-Carmedy and I don't get along very well together," Mr. David protested.

"She didn't react very favorably to the first mention of your name," Captain Field admitted, "but I soon fixed that. I pointed out that this was no time to allow personal feeling to sway us from the path of duty. I recalled your war record—that is, the brighter part of it. I made no mention of the fact that your fertile mind originated the plan of paying French profiteers with American cigar-store coupons. I was discreetly silent about the M. P.'s who put up with you for two days of your leave in Paris, and then asked for service at the front, where things would be quieter. I stressed only the brighter part, and Mrs. Brece-Carmedy was satisfied. So was I. And I know you are. That makes it perfect."

THERE was a long, heavy silence. "Tomorrow afternoon," the Captain continued, "Mrs. Brece-Carmedy is giving what she calls an organization tea at her camp. You will be there. You will be called upon for a few well-chosen words. The following morning, rifle practice will begin, under your supervision, of course. It will continue daily throughout the summer. That means I am shy one man, but I feel that we all should do our bit."

"The Captain certainly is proving his patriotism," was the feeble rejoinder.

Captain Field beamed upon him.

"That is very kind of you. There is one other thing, however: Mrs. Brece-Carmedy happens to have a brother, who happens to be a State senator. He happens to be chairman of an important committee, which happens to control the appropriation for this department. If Mrs. Brece-Carmedy is displeased, she will take it out on her brother. He will take it out on Major Harner, who, in turn, will take it out on me. If that process is continued, you can see where her displeasure, gathering speed and weight on the way, will land eventually."

CAPTAIN FIELD stood up.

"I mention all this merely because I happened to catch a faint gleam of anticipation in your eyes. No doubt the thought that prompted it is a pleasant one, but I wouldn't toy with it."

"Very well, sir," said Tiny David.

Captain Field departed. After a safe interval Mr. Crosby, looking very pleased with himself, returned to the living-room.

"I knew it would come," he declared, "but I didn't think it would be quite that bad. However, thanks to his foresight, Mrs. Crosby's boy is well out of it. Heeding signs is an old family trait. My Aunt Eva always used to say that when she smelled gin, she knew that Uncle Caleb was home. By the same token, when I talk about the Old Man's age, I know I am asking for trouble."

There was more of this, but Mr. David listened with only scant attention. Captain Field was in his office, with the door closed, and from that room there emerged an almost steady rumble of sound, the words of which they could not distinguish.

"Is the Skipper busy?" Mr. David asked the top-sergeant, who happened to be passing.

"He is doing some telephoning," said Mr. Payton.

"He has a nice afternoon for it," declared Mr. Crosby.

"He will need most of the afternoon," Mr. Payton asserted. "I looked up the numbers of twelve newspapers for him."

"Newspapers?" Mr. David started.

"Newspapers," Mr. Payton repeated. "He very kindly told Mrs. Brece-Carmedy he would handle her publicity. He's tipping the papers off to the tea tomorrow, and telling them they should be able to get some swell pictures."

Mr. Payton, having scattered his share of sunshine, moved on.

"I wouldn't let it get me down," Mr. Crosby advised Mr. David. "Lots of things can happen between now and then."

"Name one!" Mr. David ordered.

Mr. Crosby pondered in silence for some time, but then his face brightened.

"You could be smacked down with typhoid fever."

"But I won't," Mr. David moaned. "Neither will Mrs. Brece-Carmedy."

Mr. David turned to the radio for comfort, but found none. The German military machine rolled onward. The commentator, however, did find time to devote a few words to local news. In Syracuse, three well-dressed young men, posing as guests, had gained entrance to the apartment of a social leader and escaped with jewels valued at eighty thousand dollars. This, it appeared, was the fourth robbery credited to the three men, who were known as the "Café Society Bandits."

"It provides a bit of comedy relief," was Mr. Crosby's verdict.

But Mr. David refused to be amused.

THE following morning dawned bright and clear, and proved Mr. David a true prophet: Neither he nor Mrs. Brece-Carmedy had typhoid.

In the afternoon the organization tea went off as per schedule, and eventually Mr. David found himself on his feet addressing a group of women of assorted sizes, ages and dispositions. Hanging about the edge of the group were reporters and photographers, all of whom wore cynical smiles. Needless to say, Mr. David was not at his best.

"While I don't know just what we are going to do," he began, "I know we will all do our best. This is no time for—"

The black lines that served Mrs. Brece-Carmedy as eyebrows were raised.

Mr. David quickly changed his tune:

"I am sure that we all applaud Mrs. Brece-Carmedy for her patriotism, and we all realize much can be accomplished under her leadership. She informs me that the gardener has constructed a rifle-range in the field behind the camp. Rifle-practice will start tomorrow morning. Everybody please report at ten."

There was polite applause. Then Mr. David was surrounded by reporters.

"Do you think these da—er—these ladies can shoot?" one demanded.

"They can learn," Mr. David retorted.

"Suppose they do, what are they going to shoot—each other?"

Mr. David fought back the impulse to say that he hoped they would.

"My job is to teach them to shoot, not to provide things for them to shoot at." He sighed wearily. "They are counting on Mr. Hitler to do *that*."

At this point Mrs. Brece-Carmedy had a few more words for her followers. Mr. David took advantage of the lull to grab several of the more substantial-appearing sandwiches, and to seek temporary refuge behind a boxwood hedge. There he was joined by an old friend, William Neff, who owned and edited a weekly paper known as the *Sentinel*.

"What did you do to bring this on yourself?" Mr. Neff asked.

Mr. David sighed. "It's a long story, Bill. Let's skip it."

"Can I help? The *Sentinel* is very anti-Mrs.-Brece-Carmedy, you know."

Mr. David pondered.

"I don't see how, Bill. But wait: could you write an editorial panning this thing, and making it as ridiculous as it really is?"

Mr. Neff nodded assent.

"I already had that in mind. That old gal can hand it out, but she can't take it."

"Fine!" Mr. David approved. "How about something along this line? The idea is fine, but just learning to shoot is not enough. If it stops there, the public will be justified in believing this is merely an attempt on the part of some hysterical dames to grab off some publicity for themselves. The real work is along these lonely roads near the border. The time to do that work is at night. And it can't be done by riding about in a car driven by a liveried chauffeur. You might add a line that the response to this suggestion will prove to the public whether the gals really are serious."

Mr. David smiled in self-approval.

"I have a picture of that old canal barge holding down a road at night! Something tells me the Lake Serene Parashootists will fade out of the picture in a hurry."

"I'll do it," Mr. Neff promised, "and with pleasure. But it's too late for this week's paper. You'll have to carry on until next Thursday." He grinned. "Maybe she'll pick up the wrong end of a gun and shoot herself."

"Not a chance," declared Mr. David. And then: "Get a load of this, Bill. Here comes trouble."



"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy desires your presence at once."

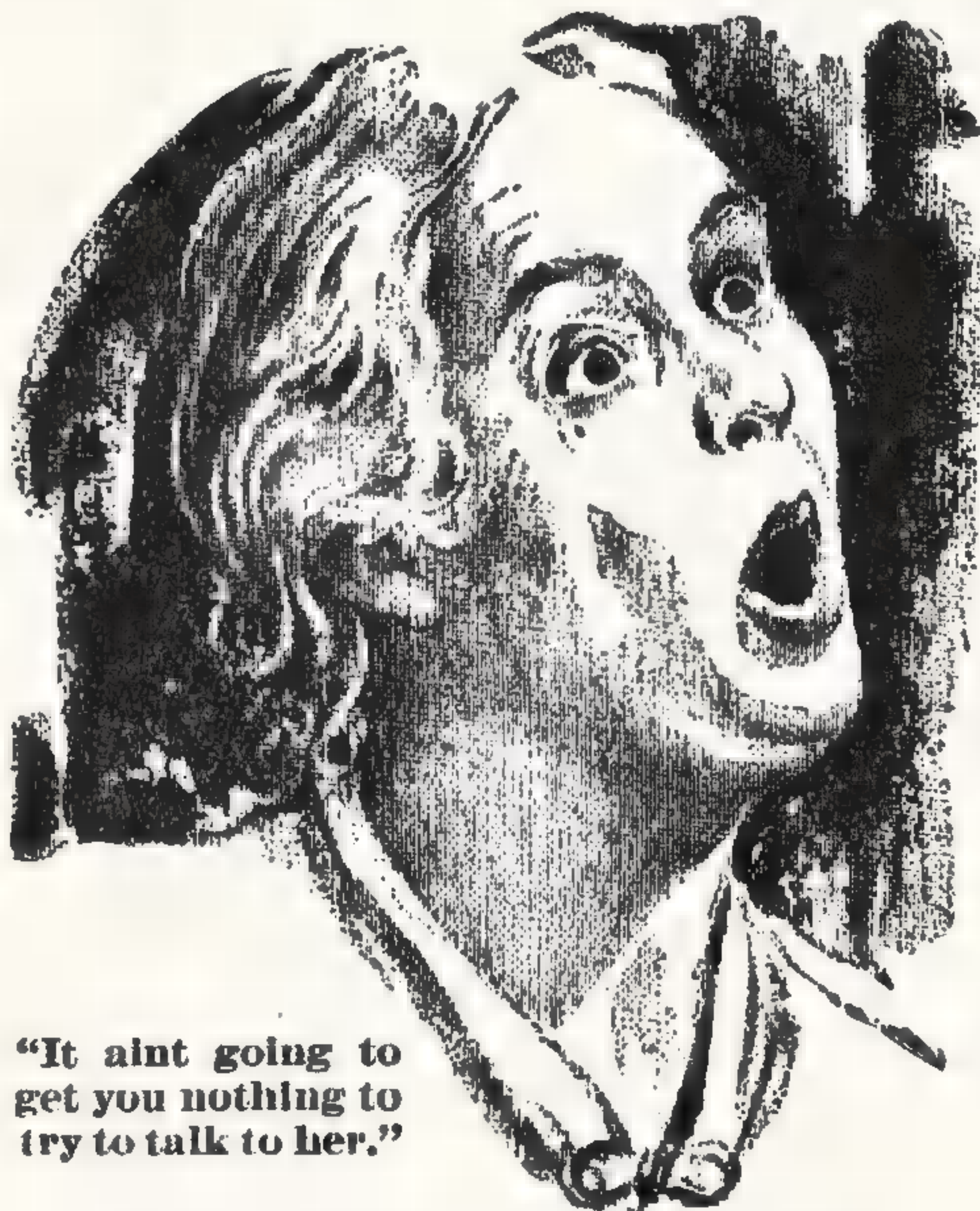
A correctly uniformed and very British butler stood before them.

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy desires your presence at once," he said, and Mr. David hastened to answer the summons. . . .

There was no respite when Tiny David returned to the barracks, for Captain Field was waiting for him.

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy tells me you may be capable—she says you showed no outward signs—but she is afraid you do not have the proper enthusiasm."

"I am very sorry, sir," said Mr. David. "In that case, maybe I had better turn things over to the Captain. Mrs. Brece-



Carmedy is very fond of him, and she prefers to deal with big executives."

"No!" Captain Field was very emphatic. "That would be selfishness on my part. I won't deprive you of your big chance. By tomorrow morning I expect you to acquire proper enthusiasm. Our appropriation comes up in Albany next week. For your sake, I hope we have no trouble with it."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. David. . . .

Before he started out the next morning a faint mirage of hope caused Mr. David to visit Captain Field in his office.

"If it please the Captain, how about these women handling rifles?"

"I'll bite," said Captain Field. "How about it?"

"I was considering the legal aspects, sir."

Captain Field's smile was benevolent.

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy and I took care of that. All the gals have hunting-licenses. Everything is jake." The smile grew broader. "Glad to see you really are taking interest in your work. Naturally, you wouldn't want any legal hitch to block it. Excellent!"

Mr. David retired in bad order.

That morning was a nightmare. There were twenty-two women. Each woman had a rifle, but many of the women were enjoying their first acquaintance with that weapon. They all wanted to shoot at once. Mrs. Brece-Carmedy had definite ideas, which she aired at length and with considerable volume. The newspaper photographers, who by this time needed no urging by Captain Field, were on hand again.

Shortly before luncheon a news-reel outfit appeared on the scene. The camera-man calmly selected the outstanding beauty among the shooters.

"Aim your gun at the sky," he directed. He turned to Mr. David. "Stand beside her, and point up, as if you had spotted a parachute soldier."

"I will not," said Mr. David.

"Lieutenant David will be glad to cooperate," said Mrs. Brece-Carmedy.

Mr. David pointed. Later the butler and several assistants served an excellent luncheon. Mr. David did not enjoy it.

ON Saturday a special-delivery letter arrived at the barracks for Mr. David, who opened it to find a proof of the editorial that Mr. Neff had written. Mr. David smiled with satisfaction as he read it:

The *Sentinel* was patriotic, and it believed whole-heartedly in preparedness. Unfortunately, however, some people were not above using the grave situation to attain their own ends. This was no time for the country to humor or tolerate mere publicity-seekers.

If the Lake Serene Parashootists, who by this time certainly should know one end of a gun from the other, did some serious, constructive work, the paper was all for them. In addition to the various regular law-enforcement agencies, volunteer patrols could do excellent and needed work in these troubled times along the roads leading from the border. The time for the patrols was at night. There might be an element of danger, but surely women who hoped to shoot parachute soldiers would not flinch from that.

If, on the other hand, the parashootists intended to confine their activities to a bit of target practice, and posing for newspaper pictures, the *Sentinel* had only contempt for the project. That contempt would be shared by all patriotic and right-minded citizens of northern New York.

Mr. David smiled as he pocketed the proof, and departed to his task. Thursday was a long way off, but it was nice to have something to look forward to.

Meanwhile the rifle-practice went along steadily. Several of the women dropped out, but even Mr. David was forced to admit that quite a few of his pupils showed promise. The newspaper publicity fell off a bit, but the kidding directed at Mr. David did not.

"It's great to have friends!" he muttered bitterly.

Thursday afternoon Tiny David returned to the barracks to find Messrs. Crosby and Payton scanning the skies anxiously.

"There's one of them," said Mr. Payton, who reached for his revolver.

"Don't shoot him," Mr. Crosby ordered. "You have no union card. Leave him for Tiny and the girls."

Mr. David went to his room, but soon Mr. Crosby appeared.

"Telephone call for you. Mrs. Brece-Carmedy. She sounds sore. Did you drink your coffee without taking your spoon out of the cup?"

Mr. David went to the telephone with a feeling of pleasant anticipation.

"Have you read the *Sentinel*?" Mrs. Brece-Carmedy demanded.

"No," said Mr. David, quite truthfully. "I haven't seen the paper this week."

"Well!" Mrs. Brece-Carmedy went into action. She read the editorial to Mr. David, who already knew it by heart. She devoted hundreds of words to Mr. Neff. Then, with barely a pause for breath, she demanded: "Can you come over here right away?"

"It's rather late," Mr. David objected.

"If she wants you to come over, you'll get started right away."

Mr. David turned, and faced Captain Field, who stood in the doorway.

"I'll be right over," Mr. David told Mrs. Brece-Carmedy.

"I read it an hour ago," said Captain Field. "If you ask me, you and Bill Neff overdid it a bit. I am betting that this is going to snap back at you."

THREE hours later a chastened Mr. David returned to the barracks. He had several things on his mind, the most pressing of which was the desire to avoid Captain Field. Therefore he entered by the back way, and went at once to his room—where he found the Captain installed on the bed, calmly smoking a long black cigar.

"I didn't want to miss you," Captain Field explained, "so I waited in your favorite hang-out."

Mr. David attempted a counter-attack:

"I was hoping to see the Captain—"

"But not for several weeks," Captain Field interrupted. "I know all about it. Mrs. Brece-Carmedy is cut to the quick that anybody should question her patriotism. That good-for-nothing Neff merely suggested what she always has had in mind. The patrols will start to-

morrow night. Furthermore, Mrs. Brece-Carmedy has no intention of using her position to avoid her share of the work. She will hold down a post, preferably the most lonely one."

Captain Field put his cigar aside.

"I understand you raised several legal questions. You promised to consult a competent legal authority, but advised her to do nothing until she hears from you." Captain Field's smile was bland. "Isn't it lucky that I am a competent authority, and that you happened to run into me right away, so that there won't be any delay?"

Mr. David swallowed hastily.

"Yes sir," he contributed.

"Put what you call your mind at rest," Captain Field continued. "The gals have rifles, so nobody will hurt 'em. They have hunting-licenses, so they have a right to carry the rifles. We had that out once before. They won't hurt anybody, because they will confine themselves to observation work. They will report what they see to some central point. That central point will be you."

Captain Field's pleasure increased.

"Tomorrow afternoon you will take up your residence at Mrs. Brece-Carmedy's camp. Hodges, the butler, has promised to look out for you. He seems to feel that you may profit by association with him. But all that is incidental.

"You will post the gals at various vantage-spots. You will visit each post every hour. That will serve two purposes. You can check up on the gals, and if you don't show up, the gals can report that fact to Mrs. Brece-Carmedy, who, in turn, will inform me. If the gals see anything, they can tell you when you make your rounds, or if it is pressing, call you at the camp. If you are out, Hodges will act as your secretary."

Captain Field frowned thoughtfully.

"I think I have covered about everything. . . . No, wait a minute. It is just possible that some newspaper might raise a question about the legality of all this. For your sake, I hope that doesn't happen, because then it might be necessary for you to swear the gals in as deputies, and in that event you would be liable for their actions."

MR. DAVID grabbed at a straw. "That was one thing I wanted to take up with you, sir: Even with the set-up you have outlined, how about the liability?"

Captain Field waved a massive hand.

"There may be a drop or two of liability, but we can brush that off very easily, because this is a patriotic emergency project. There is nothing to keep you from moving in on Mrs. Brece-Carmedy. She calls the place Camp Bide-a-While, and that is just what you are going to do. Best call in every evening about six. There might be something on the teletype. Besides, we always like to hear your voice."

MR. DAVID'S departure, the following afternoon, was not without incident. Mr. Crosby appeared with a large bunch of dandelions, which he tossed on the rear seat of the car.

"For your hostess," he explained. "It's the least you can do, now that you are going to bed down on her for the summer."

Captain Field's voice came from a window:

"On David's day off, Crosby, you may relieve him."

Mr. Crosby retired hastily.

That evening Mr. Payton had an appreciative audience while he received Mr. David's telephoned report.

"Good evening, sir," said Mr. Payton. "Just a minute, please. I'll see if there is anything for you and the girls. Let's see. The Café Society Bandits pulled another job in Syrchester. Fought it out with the police and escaped, but they are believed to be headed south. Besides, you and the girls wouldn't bother with trivial things like that."

Mr. Payton leafed through his slips.

"Oh, yes. One Ruth Aikers reports the theft of three pink garments, technically known as scanties, from a line in the rear of her home in Lake Serene. If you and the girls should happen—"

Mr. Payton turned to his audience.

"He hung up," he explained.

The following evening the audience was even larger.

"Good evening, sir," Mr. Payton began. "I trust that you and the girls—" His face fell, and he covered the telephone with his hand. "He has gone official on me," he informed the crowd. "Very well, sir. We have only one report. Missing airplane."

Mr. Payton consulted his data:

"Owned and piloted by Walter Haines, who took off from Maetown, bound for Syrchester, where a business associate was waiting for him at the airport. Nobody saw the take-off, but people heard the plane in the air, and it seemed to

be in no trouble. Haines is overdue at Syrchester, and nothing has been heard from him. The plane is a blue and white four-place cabin job. The license number is NR 364908. That's all, Lieutenant."

Mr. David sighed wearily as he made his way to a car, where six more or less enthusiastic women were waiting for him. The start of the patrol work had been accompanied by a marked falling-off in the membership. A few hardy souls remained, however, and foremost among them was Mrs. Brece-Carmedy.

"We have been waiting," said the founder of the Lake Serene Parashootists, with an ominous note in her voice.

Mr. David drove on in silence. One by one the ladies were deposited at their posts. During that process there was considerable grumbling, but it was met firmly by Mrs. Brece-Carmedy, who quit the car only when the last post, which was not far from the banks of the St. Lawrence River, was reached.

"I shall expect you back here at nine," she said, holding her rifle by the muzzle, and examining the dial of a tiny wrist-watch.

"I'll be here," Mr. David promised wearily.

That done, he turned the car around, and returned to Camp Bide-a-While, where he established himself on the screened front porch. Hodges, the British butler, took his stand just inside the door, where he was able to watch the trooper.

"I have no designs on the silver," said Mr. David.

"I beg pahdon, sir?"

"I said that the moon looks like silver."

"Silver, sir?" Hodges demurred. "I rather fancy it resembles gold."

Mr. David warmed to the task at hand:

"I say silver. You say gold. We must get together. Hands across the sea, and all that sort of thing. We must find a common point, despite your dislike of common things. I take it that we both admit there is a moon. Moving forward from that point, we come—"

THERE was the muffled tinkle of a telephone bell. The suave voice of the butler carried out to the porch.

"This is Camp Bide-a-While, the residence of Mrs. Brece-Carmedy. . . . Yes, madam. . . . My word, madam!" He raised his voice. "Are you there, madam? Are you there?" Obviously there

was no answer. "I distinctly heard the sound of a falling object," he announced. "Either Mrs. Brece-Carmedy has been attacked, or she has swooned."

Tiny David was at his side.

"What's it all about?" he demanded.

Hodges' dignity returned:

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy called to inform us that she thought she had shot a man. She said that he descended with a parachute. I was about—"

"Where did she call from?"

"I was about to obtain that information, when I heard the sound of the falling object. Under those circumstances, I—"

David raced to his car.

"This is a fine mess," he muttered, as he drove on through the night, headed for Mrs. Brece-Carmedy's post. "More publicity! Maybe a nice damage suit. Well, I was acting under orders."

The car covered more miles, and then the headlights revealed a crowd gathered about a filling-station. David halted, and climbed out.

"IS Mrs. Brece-Carmedy around here?" he asked.

"She be," said a native. He jerked a thumb at a building near by. "The missus has her in there. She passed out after phoning, and right now she is hysterical. It aint going to get you nothing to try to talk to her."

"What happened?" David asked.

"Near as I can make out, she heard an airplane. We heard it too. Then she says a bird came floating down in a parachute, and she took a shot at him, thinkin' he was one of those there, now, parachute soldiers. She thinks she hit him, but he got loose from his parachute and beat it into the woods. She come here."

"Where did this happen?"

"I'll show you," a youth volunteered. "She dropped her gun, and I found it."

"What became of the airplane?" Tiny David asked.

"We aint sure," said his first informant. "The noise died out sudden-like."

Tiny David turned to the youth.

"All right, lad. Show me where this happened."

He led the trooper some distance down the road to a cleared field.

"She dropped her gun in there."

Tiny David vaulted a fence, and went to work with his flashlight. Soon he found a discarded parachute. Near it were the clearly defined tracks of a man, leading to the woods.



"Lord, am I glad to see you!" said the pilot.

"You stay here, lad," Tiny David ordered.

The trooper followed the tracks, scanning the ground carefully, and breathing a silent prayer of thanks because there was no trace of blood. He entered the woods warily. His awkward motions ceased, and he slipped into the easy pace of the experienced woodsman. The tracks were very plain, and it was obvious that the man who made them was not at home in the woods.

SUDDENLY Tiny David halted, as ahead of him a branch snapped. He slipped behind a tree.

"State Police!" he called. "Come out of there! I have you covered!"

The answer came from close at hand:

"Thank God! I'll be right out."

Tiny David waited. Soon a man in flying-clothes made his way toward the light from the trooper's torch.

"Lord, am I glad to see you!" said the pilot. "I never want to run into a fat dame with a rifle again." He paused beside the trooper. "I'm Walter Haines, from Maetown."

"We've been looking for you," Tiny David declared. "But just what's it all about?"

Haines shuddered.

"It's been a nightmare, trooper. I was getting into my plane in Maetown to fly to Syrchester, when three tough birds

jumped me, and made me fly them due north. On the way, they got talking. They were those birds the cops call the Café Society Bandits. A job in Syrchester went sour on them, and they had a hide-out in Maetown. Then things got hot there, and they had the bright idea of kidnaping me to fly them to Canada."

Haines accepted a cigarette.

"I knew how much chance an unauthorized plane would have in Canada these days, but I didn't say anything to them. You see, I was wearing a 'chute. They weren't. I didn't have any qualms, because I heard the two on the back seat planning to bump me off after we had landed."

The pilot pointed toward the river near by.

"They were dozing off when we came near the St. Lawrence. I set the controls, gave her the gun, kicked the door open, and bailed out." He shrugged. "You'll find my ship, three hold-up men and a bunch of loot at the bottom of the river. All that was bad enough, but then I had to run into a fat dame with a gun. One of those hysterical patriots, wasn't she?"

"She has been called that," Tiny David admitted. "Did she hit you?"

"No, but it wasn't her fault."

Tiny David led the way back to the filling-station. He called the barracks, and soon was in telephonic communication with Captain Field, who listened, promised to send grappling equipment, and then went into a monologue:

"This certainly turned out nice for you and Mrs. Brece-Carmedy. Hitler holds out on parachute soldiers, but you get a pilot to shoot at! She misses him, so there is nothing to worry about. But you do manage to cut yourselves in on the publicity that goes with the finale of that bandit crowd from Syrchester. Your outfit thrives on publicity. My scouts told me there had been a regrettable falling-off in interest, but this will act as a tonic, and carry you through the summer very nicely. Well, keep in touch with us. And remember me to Hodges."

TINY DAVID's heart was heavy as he turned away from the telephone, and stood staring at Haines. Suddenly he pulled a large handkerchief from his pocket, and proceeded to tie it about the arm of the pilot.

"What's the big idea?" Haines demanded.

"All you have to do is to agree with what I say," Tiny David told him. "Come on. We are going to have a few words with the fat dame who tried to wing you."

SOME hours later Tiny David sat across a desk from Captain Field.

"Mrs. Brece-Carmedy has been in touch with me," said the Captain. "She is very much upset about wounding Mr. Haines, and is very grateful to him because he has agreed not to take any action. She also is worried because she is afraid the pals of the dead bandits will be looking for her. She is not one to shirk her duty, but she has received an urgent call to go to California. All in all, she has decided to disband the Lake Serene Parashootists. I promised her we would carry on the best we could without that valuable aid."

Captain Field lighted a cigar.

"I can't understand where she got her dope. You told me Haines wasn't hurt, and she had as much to do with bumping off those bandits as you had with the French-German peace terms. If I were a suspicious man— But let that pass."

The Captain put the cigar aside.

"I just want to straighten you out on a few things. I hate phonies as much as you do. My contempt increases when they try to cash in on an emergency that has most of us walking the floor at nights. But when a phony drapes herself in patriotism, and has influential friends in the background, the situation calls for a bit of handling."

Captain Field's voice grew louder.

"Get that smirk off your face. It took you long enough to handle it—and then I had to draw a diagram for you! 'No, Captain, Haines wasn't hurt. She missed him.' I may be old, as you so kindly pointed out, but I haven't lived long enough to be dumb as that."

The commanding officer pawed about in a drawer, and produced a letter which he tossed to Tiny David. Upon his face there was visible the sort of pride that a boy feels as he views his first pony.

"The War Department has reconsidered," he gloated. "In the event of a declaration of war, I get a commission."

Tiny David extended his big hand.

"Congratulations, sir. I'd be right proud to serve under the Captain! . . . But right now I could do with a bit of sleep. You see, sir, I am just getting over a bad attack of *parashootitis*."

Another story by Robert Mill will appear in an early issue.

Our Readers' Forum

A MAGAZINE FOR ARMY CAMPS

READING with the eye and mind of a writer, I find BLUE BOOK excellent and consistent. Reading as a mother, I find it just right for the men of my family, and so refreshing for my daughters and myself, as a relief from the ultra-sophistication of the modern fiction magazines. It is grand to pick up a stirring adventurous book, free from sex frustration and disillusionment.

I am wondering if some way can't be found to place BLUE BOOK in the army camps. I have a son on the way to camp, and it is the kind of reading that those clean wholesome live American boys we are sending will love.

Try to keep out class-hatred stories. It is a problem today, and so far you have been so free of it. Editors as well as writers have a job today as a fine balance must be kept if we are to attain moral as well as physical defense in our country.

Thanks for a grand clean fair book,
Mrs. Marjorie Denham
Kansas City, Mo.

AND A LION TOO

THREE cheers and a tiger—and a lion too. for BLUE BOOK, the magazine for adventurous men.

The general magazines seem to be mostly devoted to "Lahve," with impossibly beautiful girls being courted by improbably successful men. And some of the masculine magazines seem to be run on the idea that all men are interested in is dirt.

But BLUE BOOK represents the tastes of the adventure-loving man who isn't quite satisfied with going to the movies on Saturday night for excitement.

Yours for more and better two-fisted stories.
Maurice Lowry
Geneseo, N.Y.

P.S. I know quite a few women who read BLUE BOOK too. Maybe they get sick of reading articles on how to put paper panties on lamb-chops.

FROM A CLERGYMAN

I LIKE the BLUE BOOK so much that I have just sent in a two-year subscription. As a Negro would put it: "Here is quality." The magazine stands far above all other periodicals printing adventure yarns. There is a literary zest to the writing not found elsewhere. In many of the stories there is an underlying spirit which lifts them out of the level of mere yarns. Examples of this are "Under the Crooked Cross," in the August number, "The Port of Little Ships" in the October number

and "Golden Slippers" in the November number. The stories leave a wholesomeness in the heart. Somehow you have a little more faith that men and women are inherently good.

Your selection of plots is well balanced. Only don't overdo the war. My most serious criticism is in your detective stories. They seem to me by no means up to the rest of the magazine.

Rev. Harry W. Kimball
Needham, Mass.

FROM "DOWN UNDER"

I GOT my magazine from the bookstalls until BLUE BOOK started its present policy of stories with a kick. Now, in order not to miss a copy, I subscribe direct. I have always believed that in order to get a good thing one must pay a good price, and so was very pleased to find BLUE BOOK raised to 25c, with a more than corresponding increase in both quality and quantity.

What do I like? Well, the cover design is always O.K. and the work of an artist. I do not like the minor illustrations of the book-length novel; they are too scrappy to add much interest.

But the stories are good; I like the idea of the book-length novel—I always reserve that story until I have a spare hour or two so that I can finish without interruption. Historical novels always go well with me, and when of novelette length I count myself lucky. I find continued stories confusing when one goes a month till the next installment. The intention of the continued story is to add to sales; does BLUE BOOK need that as a fillip? As an exile in a foreign country I have a taste for other foreign-country stories.

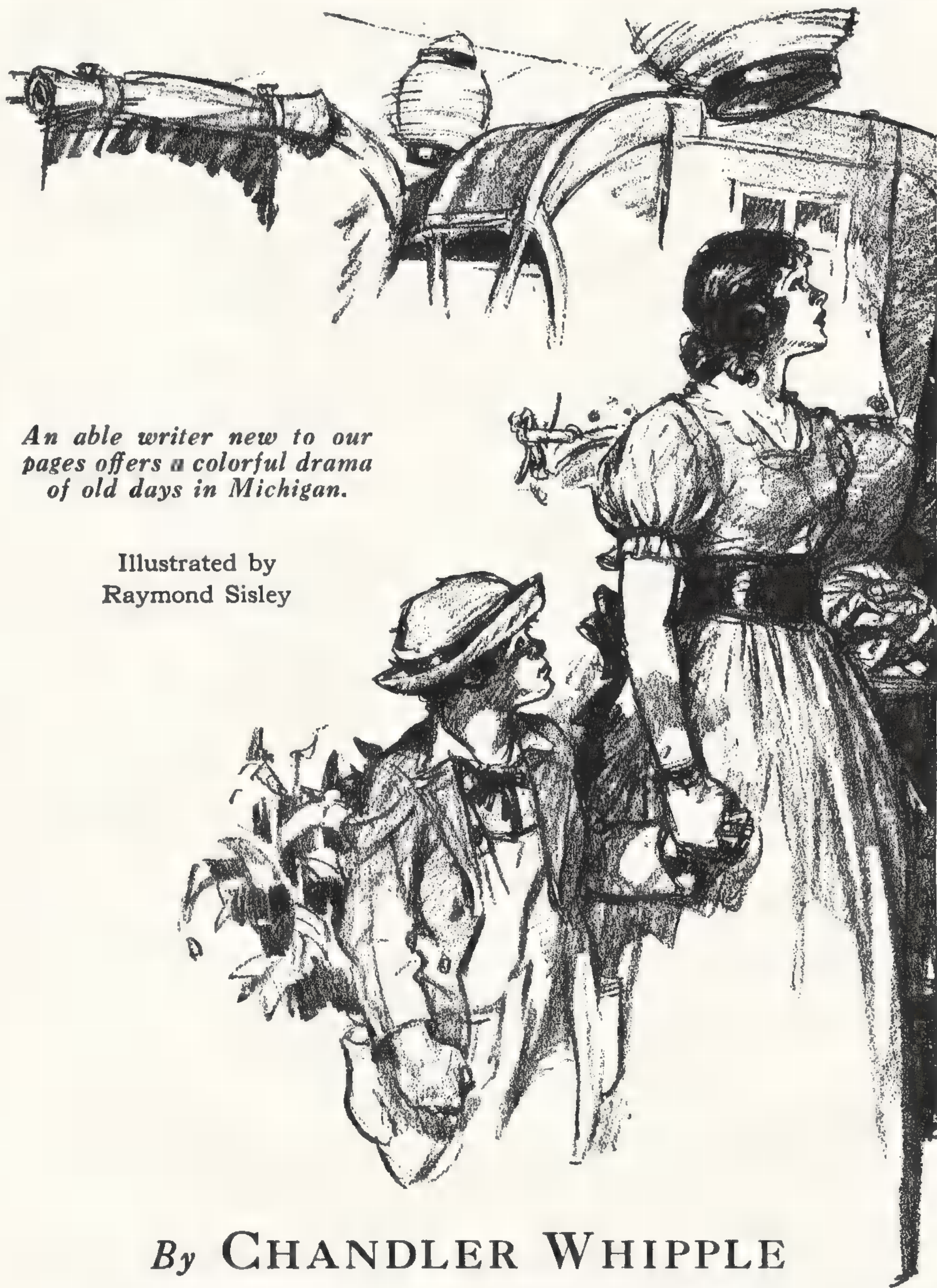
What do I want? War stories (preferably past wars), historical stories, a full-length novel (to take the place of the continued story), a novelette or two—and plenty of kick.

Rupert Harrison
Kohukohu, New Zealand

*The Editors of the BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the half-dozen or so we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.



An able writer new to our pages offers a colorful drama of old days in Michigan.

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley

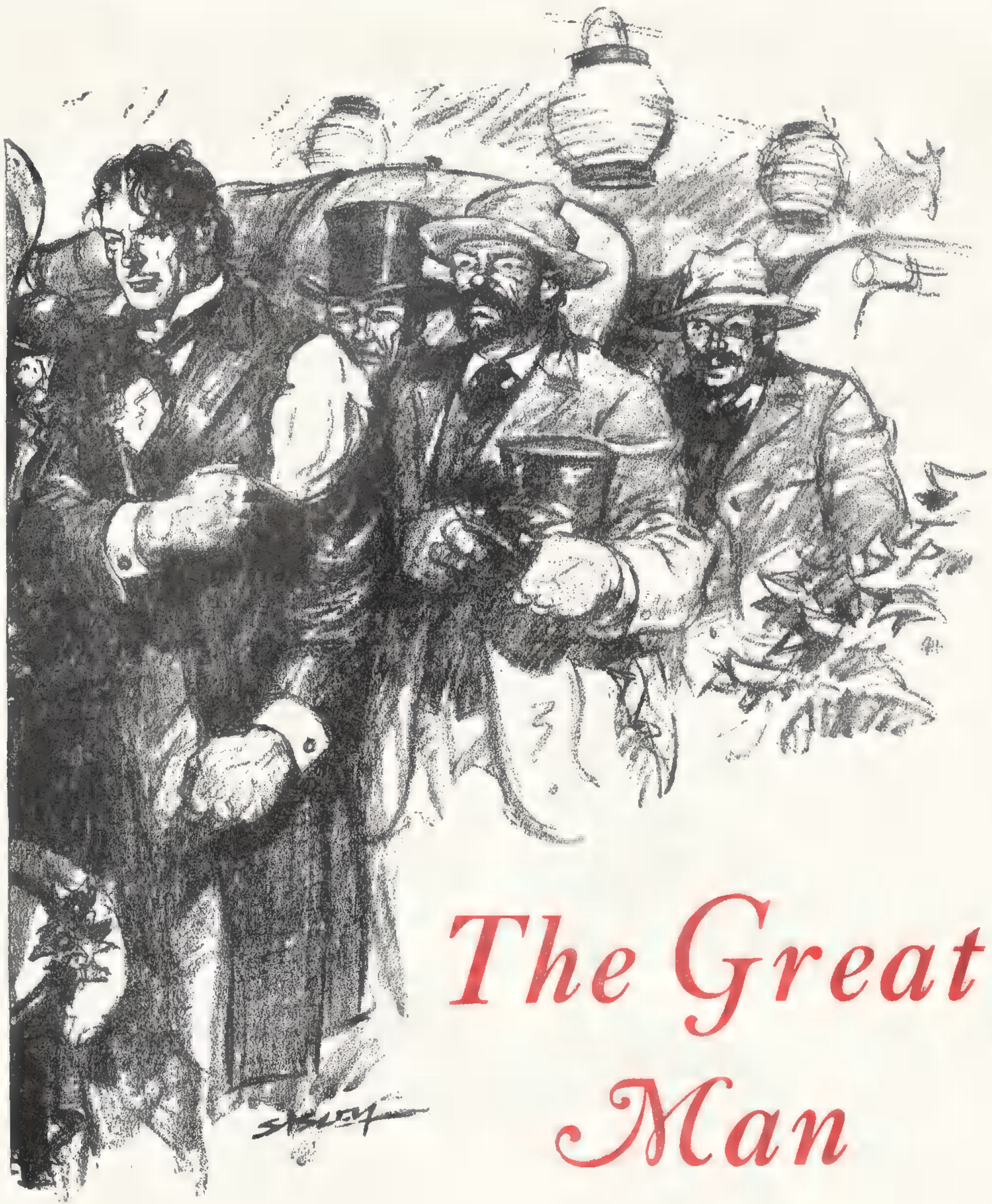
By CHANDLER WHIPPLE

TIMOTHY bent the point of his hook ever so slightly till it had exactly that upward swoop he thought was necessary for catching a "punkin-seed," or sunfish.

This was a very special hook, made for him this morning by his Uncle Ethan, who was just back from fighting Indians and hunting Spanish gold in the West. His uncle had taken a piece of wire and spent a great deal of time pointing it on the grindstone down at the sawmill. Quite often the things Uncle Ethan gave you did not do what they were expected

to, but something quite the opposite; and when that happened, Uncle Ethan would laugh at you with his great booming laugh; but in this case there was no doubt that the hook was a fine one and would work. Already he had one fish.

He impaled a fat angleworm. His wet feet sparkled in the sun as he cast out with the hickory pole, and he wondered vaguely how it would be to find a mountain of gold. The thought was all mixed up in his mind, though, with watching the men cradling wheat across the river. Their arms flashed rhythmically, and the



The Great Man

wheat was pale shining yellow in the sun, and much plainer in his mind than the thought of a mountain of gold.

When you are seven, none of these things matters so much as the tug of a fish on the line. He felt the tug and his heart pounded a little as it always did at such a time. He wrinkled his nose, and with his arm pushed back on his head the visored cap his uncle had brought him, making ready for business. Then he pulled on the hickory pole, and the fish, yellow too like gold and the wheat, splashed on the top of the water and swung in toward his waiting hand.

Timothy was catching fish as a great-souled act and a pleasant penance. That

morning at breakfast he had heard his sister Annabelle complaining to his mother that she didn't see how she was going to help get dinner for the family and the men at the mill and still be ready in time to go to town with Mr. Hilton for the speeches. Timothy saw his chance. Annabelle had been a little sharp with him, and he suspected it was because she did not really want him to go with her and Mr. Hilton. Now he very virtuously said he would help by catching and cleaning enough fish for dinner.

Annabelle gave him a long look, and then suddenly laughed. "You fraud!" she said, and then she came over and



"And how are the Tenth Dragoons, Captain?" Mr. Hilton asked.

kissed him. And Timothy had felt pretty fine.

Of course, it was hardly Timothy's fault, anyhow. . . . Hadn't Gregory Hilton asked him to go? It was just yesterday that Timothy's father had said to Gregory Hilton that on account of the work the new railroad, that now came clear to town, had brought to the mill, he himself wouldn't be able to take his family to hear the Senator as he had planned. Maybe Timothy had said something then about wanting to go; but anyhow Gregory Hilton had come right out with a smile and said: "Well, young man, looks as if you'll have to go with Annebelle and me." Naturally, Timothy couldn't refuse. . . .

In his mind, as he brought in the third fish, he could already hear the band playing in the shady square, and see the jos-

ting crowd, and himself striding down the rumbling wooden walk toward the speakers' stand. The town was twelve miles away, and he had not been there many times; and anyway, today was pretty special. The great man, the Senator from Washington, was going to give the principal speech. Timothy had heard much about him from his father, and for him he held a place like Washington and the other heroes. He could not quite imagine how it would be to see and hear such a man, but it excited him and made him feel important.

HIS thoughts, quick as flashing cradles in the hands of sweating men, agile as the twisting fish upon the hook, swept on. When, an hour later, he found his bucket filled with fish, he had himself been the Senator giving his ringing speech before the crowd, riding through the streets of Washington in a glittering carriage. Once, with a flip of the fish-pole, he had told the President where to get off. Now, as he walked toward the house with the heavy bucket, the bucket vanished and the hickory pole became a fine sword across his shoulder. He walked easily, for he was riding now, a general home in triumph from Napoleon's wars. The thanks that Annabelle bestowed him on arrival were lost in the huzzas of the welcoming throng. . . .

Timothy did not stand upon ceremony. As soon as he saw Gregory Hilton's horse and buggy in the drive, he ran downstairs and opened the door. Gregory Hilton tied the black mare to the hitching-post and started up the steps. When he saw Timothy stiffly holding the door open, he smiled and carried out the game.

He took off his stovepipe hat and bowed low. "How do you do, sir?" he said. "Mr. Hilton presents his compliments, and would you make Miss Annabelle Warren acquainted with the fact."

"Yes sir, Colonel," said Timothy, managing a bow himself. "I'll call her right away, sir."

"And how are the Tenth Dragoons, Captain?" Mr. Hilton asked. "Are their pistols primed and their buttons shined? Are their horses ready?"

Timothy clicked his heels. "Colonel Featheringstone," he said proudly, "every man of the Tenth Dragoons is ready to ride with you to the death."

"Splendid, Captain," said Mr. Hilton. "As soon as we rescue the fair damsel in distress, we shall carry her safe down the hill through shot and shell."

He certainly was dressed up fit to kill, what with his frock coat and white stiff collar. But then, even if Mr. Hilton was a farmer like everybody else, he was studying law besides, and people said he would amount to something. People said that pretty soon they would be sending him to the State Legislature in Detroit. Timothy supposed that probably in Detroit everybody dressed like that all the time.

Timothy did not have to call Annabelle. She was already coming down the stairs, wearing the dress with the puffed-out skirt. She went over to Gregory Hilton and held out her hand and said, "How do you do, Mr. Hilton," looking stuck-up and awkward the way she did when men were around.

Gregory Hilton took her hand and kissed it. "Now, now, Annabelle. None of that," he said, and grinned.

Annabelle smiled then too, and with the flowers in her dark hair and all, she looked very pretty. "Very well, Mr. Gregory Hilton," she said, and was not stuck-up or awkward any more.

Timothy felt pleased with her. He always liked her when she was different from his everyday sister.

After that Timothy did not pay much attention to them, being busy with the final preparations. He got the basket of picnic dinner that Annabelle had prepared for them to eat under the trees in the town square, and put it under the buggy seat. There wasn't room for three people on the seat, and he would have to sit in the box in back and dangle his legs over the road, so he ran down to the mill and snatched a short board to put across the box and make the ride easier. Then, while Gregory Hilton helped Annabelle into the buggy, he untied the black mare and threw the tie-rope in beside the dinner basket. He climbed onto the board; Gregory Hilton clucked to the mare; and they were off at a fast trot toward town.

THE afternoon was well along. They had had their basket dinner with a hundred others in the square, and Timothy long since had felt himself swept up by the milling people and the swirling sounds about him—the rattle of wheels and the neigh of horses in the road, the swaggering talk of many voices; and cutting through every now and then, the high metallic sound of the band tuning up down at the square. He got the same kind of pleasure out of this smothering of noise that he got from standing inside

his father's sawmill when all the wheels were turning, only this was even better. He was lost in it, and felt himself part of something great and fine.

They had been walking down the old rumbling wooden sidewalk together, the three of them, and they came to the Widow Peet's millinery shop. Annabelle wanted to go in and look at the two sample bonnets the Widow Peet advertised as being exact copies of the latest from Boston, for genteel ladies. Gregory Hilton said he would wait outside. Timothy waited too, for a moment, then noticed a commotion across the street. He ran over to see what it was. Two town boys were fighting. They were not much older than himself, but they looked so tough that it frightened him even to watch them. He was afraid they might turn and see him there, but he hung to the edge of the little group watching them just the same, fascinated.

The boys would hit each other a few times, then stand back and call each other dirty names. About the third time they stood back, the biggest of them stopped talking and looked at Timothy. He spat.

"Stop grinnin' at me, hayseed," he said.

Timothy tried to slip farther back into the ring of watchers. Then he realized that there were no longer any other watchers. He turned around in panic and started away.

ACROSS the street the crowd was reforming, bigger now. It was not the ordinary kind that Timothy had watched ever since he had been in town, but the tight, quiet kind of crowd that did not move and had no opening. Out of the middle of it came one high-pitched voice that sounded familiar, but no one else was speaking.

Timothy, impelled both by curiosity and by fear of the town boy, started to wriggle through the crowd. By twisting around and between people's legs, he managed to reach the center. There, finding himself right beside Gregory Hilton, he stopped short.

The one who was talking was Jeremiah Stotes, a man whom Timothy's father sometimes met upon the road and talked with angrily. He stood now on the wooden mounting-block in front of the hardware store, his red beard jumping up and down as he talked, dressed as always in rough woolen shirt and torn trousers tucked into boots.

"You're a pack of fools!" he said. "You've come to town to hear a Senator speak. You've come here to make sheep's-eyes at the great man from Washington, happy as all get-out that he'll take the trouble to talk to a passel of backwoods farmers—"

Gregory Hilton took a step forward and raised his hand. "Talk comes easy to you, Stotes," he said. "Now tell us what you're driving at. What's wrong with our coming to town today to listen to the Senator?"

STOTES looked down at him and sneered. "Gregory Hilton!" he said. "I might've known! And you want to know what's wrong with listening to the Senator? Well, I'll tell you: The Senator is a demagogue and a tool of the vested interests—a Judas and a thief!"

"Explain that," said Gregory Hilton sharply.

"Gladly. You fools think that this man has come to you to discuss with you the problems of the nation. You think he's come to talk over matters concerning his representation in Washington of the State of Michigan. Well, you're wrong—dead wrong. He's come here to sell you on putting the railroad on through to the lake shore!"

"Even if that were true," said Gregory Hilton, "there'd be no reason for not listening to him. Are you such a fool as to think we should block the railroad?"

"Fool?" said Stotes. "Folks, I want you to hear this! The railroad has made suckers of us. There was a time when the State of Michigan owned this railroad. Then some city slickers from the East come in. Thanks to such men as the Senator, they were able to contract to buy the road at half its value—then they paid in depreciated State bonds. They cheated the people of Michigan, this monster that is the railroad, of two millions of dollars—and now they won't even pay a poor farmer for the stock they kill! The railroad, folks, is a Laocoön that's squeezing us tight in its coils, a viper with its fangs upon us. The railroad—"

"The railroad," Gregory Hilton shouted him down, "is the hope of Michigan. Without it our grain lies rotting in our barns, our stock dies of old age in our fields! It's the one chance for the Western farmer to make a living, and everybody here but Jeremiah Stotes knows it!"

There was a nodding of heads. The face of Jeremiah Stotes got redder.

"Right or wrong," he shouted, "the railroad belongs to the people of this State. It's time we put a stop to private aggrandizement of our own property!"

"Tell me," said Gregory Hilton, "where would the railroad have been if the people of the State of Michigan had kept it? In the years that this State owned it, not a single mile of track was laid!"

"That's neither here nor there," said Stotes loudly and quickly. "I'm talking about the Senator. That man owns stock in this railroad. Under the guise of a representative of the people, he's coming here to sell us on his private business. It's graft and corruption."

"Stotes, you're talking nonsense," Gregory Hilton said. "You've got no proof that he does own stock. And if he does, I still say that if he speaks for the railroad, he still speaks in the best interests of the people of this State."

"And I say he's crooked as a scythe-handle, and a drunken bum to boot." Stotes was yelling now. "Right now I'll warrant you'll find him down at the bar of the Hubbard House, guzzling whisky to force a blood-heating speech from his lying throat."

"If whisky makes a man as good a public servant as the Senator," said Gregory Hilton, "then maybe a little of it would be good for all of us. If I were in the Legislature, he'd still get my vote."

"So would the devil," snapped Stotes, "if he ran on the Whig ticket."

GREGORY HILTON stroked his chin and smiled. "Well now, Jeremiah," he said, "I should consider it a strong point in the devil's favor. Indeed I should."

The crowd laughed. Stotes looked wildly around at them, and it seemed to Timothy that his face was almost black. He stepped down from the block.

"Damn you, Hilton," he said, "you lawyers can always out-talk me. See if you can talk through this." And he struck Gregory Hilton across the mouth.

Gregory Hilton's head snapped back. For a moment he stood there, not doing anything, the blood going out of his face. No one was laughing now, and Timothy's heart stopped and his nails dug into his palms. Gregory Hilton was of average height, but while he stood there, Stotes seemed to tower above him.

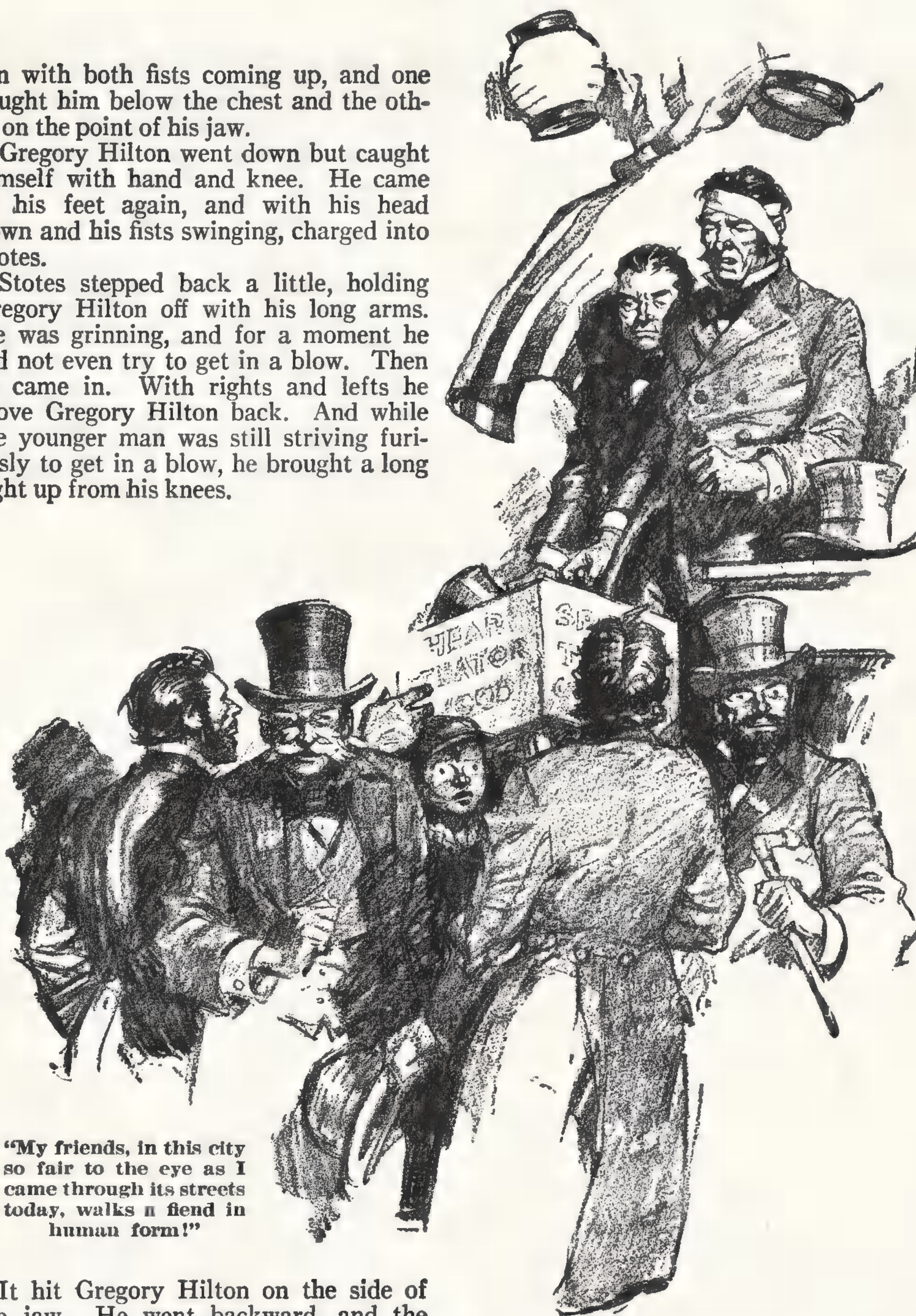
Then his fist swung up and *thunked* against Stotes' jaw.

Stotes staggered a little, but then he laughed. He swept in on Gregory Hil-

ton with both fists coming up, and one caught him below the chest and the other on the point of his jaw.

Gregory Hilton went down but caught himself with hand and knee. He came to his feet again, and with his head down and his fists swinging, charged into Stotes.

Stotes stepped back a little, holding Gregory Hilton off with his long arms. He was grinning, and for a moment he did not even try to get in a blow. Then he came in. With rights and lefts he drove Gregory Hilton back. And while the younger man was still striving furiously to get in a blow, he brought a long right up from his knees.



"My friends, in this city so fair to the eye as I came through its streets today, walks a fiend in human form!"

It hit Gregory Hilton on the side of the jaw. He went backward, and the boards of the sidewalk rattled as he struck. For an instant he lay there without moving, while Stotes stood over him, waiting.

"Git up, Mr. Hilton," said Timothy in a sobbing voice. "Git up and sock it to 'im."

Gregory Hilton rose up on one elbow. His nose was bloody, his lips swollen; and Timothy could see a rip in the right shoulder of his frock coat. He shook his head and struggled, but could not seem to rise.

Jeremiah Stotes brushed his thick palms across each other. "Words," he said. "A dee-vice for to confound fools. They don't stack up with fists." His laugh was loud.

He looked around him, waiting for someone else to enjoy his joke. Nobody else laughed. After waiting a moment, he started toward the crowd. A lane opened for him and he passed through.

A voice in the crowd said: "Somebody's goin' to have to take care of Jere-

miah Stotes mighty soon. He's gittin' too big fer his boots."

The crowd began to break up. A farmer started forward to help Gregory Hilton, but the latter was coming out of his daze now. He waved the man away and slowly rose to his feet.

Timothy felt sick. Gregory Hilton had been licked! He had let Jeremiah Stotes lick him, and now he was just staring around and not doing a thing about it.

TIMOTHY heard a rustle of skirts. It was his sister Annabelle. She gasped, "Gregory!" in a funny way, and her hand went up to her mouth. She started toward Gregory Hilton, then looked around her and stopped short.

Gregory Hilton turned and tried to smile at her with his puffed lips. "Well," he said. "Well, Annabelle—"

Annabelle drew herself up.

"Mr. Hilton," she said, "I didn't know you'd made street brawling one of your accomplishments."

She was very angry now—or rather, hurt with the kind of hurt that turns to anger. Timothy could tell that she was mad, and he didn't blame her. He felt ashamed that he knew Gregory Hilton, and wanted to get out of here. Why hadn't he chased Jeremiah Stotes and cleaned up on him?

Gregory Hilton brushed the dust off his frock coat and trousers and tried to smooth his thick long hair. He still smiled.

"Well, Annabelle," he began again, "I wouldn't exactly say from the looks of me that I'd made it one of my accomplishments." Quite calmly he pulled the silver watch from his pocket and held it to his ear to see if it were still running. Then he looked at it. "It's almost time for the speech," he said. "Shall we go?"

"Mr. Hilton," said Annabelle stiffly, "I think I've had enough of speeches for one day. I'd like to go home."

Gregory Hilton stepped up and took her firmly by the arm. "Annabelle," he said, "let's not have any of that. I owe you an apology, and I am offering it to you. But I also owe it to my self-respect to listen to the Senator—and you are going with me."

She stepped back, freeing her arm, her brown eyes snapping. For a long moment they stood there, each staring at the other; then Gregory Hilton's eyes proved the stronger.

"Mr. Hilton," Annabelle said furiously, "I hope I never need to speak to you again. But I will go with you."

"Very well," he said.

He took her arm and they started up the street, walking swiftly in their anger and with eyes straight ahead. Timothy came up beside his sister on the other side and took her hand, wanting to tell her how he felt, but not daring. He wanted to tell her that it was all right, and he wouldn't have blamed her if she had walked away and left Gregory Hilton standing there. Annabelle, who had always been just his sister although he liked her, had suddenly become a different and special person. Now she was really the Fair Damsel in Distress. He wanted her to know that he was protecting her now, since Gregory Hilton would not be any good at that sort of thing.

The band already was playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" loudly when they reached the square, and the seats in front of the bandstand—mostly stout planks on stumps—were filling up. Still Gregory Hilton spotted three seats well to the front and led them there. Neither he nor Annabelle had spoken since they started here; and when the music was ended, he sat them down without a word.

ANNABELLE was on the opposite side of Timothy, who stretched his neck to see the people on the bandstand, amongst all the flags and bunting. He recognized one or two of them, but among the others he did not see anyone who looked important enough to be a Senator. A Senator would have to be big, and he hoped he would not turn out to be one of these men.

The man who appeared to be chairman of the ceremonies kept turning around in his seat and looking behind him. Timothy felt better. He must still be looking for the Senator. The band, silent for a bit, at last struck up "Tippecanoe," the Whig campaign tune of a few years before, which Timothy's father still sang.

Before they were quite done there was a stirring among the men seated on the stand. The band faltered and went on with its music. Then the chairman and all the others got up, some holding out their hands to another man who was coming up the steps at the rear.

He grew before Timothy's eyes as he came up the steps, till he was the tallest man Timothy had ever seen. His face was red and craggy and lean and beard-

less. He wore a stovepipe hat and a black frock coat that came below his knees, and he towered there on the stand above Timothy like a mountain.

The strange thing, though, was that he carried a cane and leaned upon it as he walked. Timothy had not ever heard that the Senator was a cripple.

The chairman introduced him, but Timothy did not even hear what he said, because his eyes and ears and mind were fastened on the Senator. Then the Senator took off his tall hat and bowed. The whole crowd gasped and then fell silent.

The Senator had been hurt. A white bandage was wrapped around his head, and there was a red spot where blood had seeped through.

HE began to speak, and at first his speech was thick and slow.

"Fellow-citizens of the great State of Michigan," he began, "people of this fair city of Pinnebog—I came here today to talk to you of matters of vital interest to this mighty nation of ours, of the Texan war and the slave States." He paused, went on: "I cannot talk of those things now. All that has been driven from my mind by that which happened today. . . . My friends, in this city so fair to the eye as I came through its streets today, walks a fiend in human form!

"Today, as I rode here on that swift train from Detroit, it was a peaceful sight. A little child played gayly in the aisle. Across from me sat a woman with a baby in her gentle arms. I looked upon these scenes with joy. But I thought, too, of how swiftly we sped onward to our destination, of the great surge of power in that mighty engine which propelled us forward. How great is the nation, I said to myself, that can thus span its forests and far reaches, bring each town and hamlet together into one united whole! How peaceful and yet how sure, I thought, sweeps on the mighty tide of empire."

His voice had become more resonant; now it quieted. "Fellow-citizens," he said, "my thoughts and the peaceful scene about me were soon to be rudely shattered. Not five miles outside this town, as we swept round a wooded curve at thirty miles an hour, there came a grinding, a screeching of brakes as the brave engineer sought to avert disaster. The coach lurched violently, throwing me from my seat into the aisle. A woman screamed. A little child sobbed out its terror—"

The Senator went on to describe, —while Timothy gripped his bench with excitement—the sight that met his eyes as he stumbled out of the coach. The engine had been derailed, the engineer badly hurt, as a result of a barricade of timber placed across the tracks. His voice again was loud and stirring, and he missed no detail, no play upon the emotions of his audience.

"I do not need to tell you," he said at last, "the cause of this awful wreck. Some vile fellow whose distorted brain opposed the railroad, some greedy villain, eager for private gain—you are all aware of farmers who have intentionally driven their stock upon the tracks and then become enraged when the railroad refused to pay more than twice the value of the stock destroyed. You all know of men who have fought the railroad from the beginning, as they have fought all their lives every bringer of progress, every means of enlightenment."

The Senator limped forward to the very edge of the stand. He leaned down, confidently. "My friends," he said, "I do not know every citizen of this town. I do not know the good and bad among you. But I do know this: somewhere among you lives this man who would destroy the lives of women and innocent children to satiate his own mad fury. Somewhere among you"—he shook an accusing finger—"perhaps in this very crowd!"

WHEN he spoke those words, Timothy looked around. He could see that everyone else was doing the same. Jeremiah Stotes sat a little off to the left. A number of people were looking at him, and he was very angry. Suddenly he leaped to his feet.

"And I say," he shouted, "you're a damned old hypocrite! You come here to plug for the railroad, and you'd've plugged for the railroad whether you got that scratch on your head or not. You're a scoundrel and a liar, that takes the salary paid you by the people of Michigan with one hand, and bleeds 'em dry with the other! I say—"

Two men pulled Stotes down, and one clamped a hand over his mouth. The Senator had been walking back to the rear of the platform, and only now did he turn about. He came back, limping more than before, wiping his bruised brow with his handkerchief.

Then he began to speak again. He seemed to ignore Jeremiah Stotes, yet

every word was directed at him. He talked on for another hour. He lashed his audience into rage. "I care not for these wounds," he said. "They are nothing. But when I think of the man who would murder in cold blood an innocent child and a woman with babe in arms, I am moved to righteous fury. . . . Only the Hand of a just God saved those innocent lives. Only a miracle, not the hand or the intent of the perpetrator, stopped that wreck short of tragedy."

IT was late. Dusk was falling, and Timothy saw a man moving about among the trees, lighting the Chinese lanterns that had been strung there. The Senator, for his closing words, put his hands behind his back and stood up to his full height.

"My friends," he said, "I have always been a man of the law. I have always said that in the strict observance of man-made laws lay the only justice short of Divine Providence. . . . Today I wonder if I have been wrong. I am an old man now, and I have lived too long. I have lived to see done a foul crime, and to know that the fiend who committed it was beyond the reach of the law. And tonight I wonder: If that man's identity be known, is his guilt the less because the law cannot prove his crime? Does the fact that the law cannot reach him make less great his need for punishment?"

"Do not think, fellow-citizens," concluded the Senator in ringing tones, "that I am here advocating lawlessness. I am still convinced that justice will find a way. I know that in this great country crime will be punished. I know that we still progress. Though I may not live to see its fulfillment, I know that the sovereign State of Michigan and the United States of America march forward through a great present toward their destiny in a mighty, shining future!"

The crowd cheered wildly. The Senator bowed and limped over and sat down. The band struck up a tune, and the people got up and began to file out of the rows of benches. Timothy, so excited he wanted to run, looked around him while he waited his chance to get out. Over to the right a woman was dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. Jeremiah Stotes was shoving his way angrily through the crowd, and Timothy wanted to go over and spit on him.

He looked back to Annabelle, wondering why she did not get up so he could



"Why don't you pull this rope, Wash-

get out. Then he saw that Gregory Hilton still sat stiffly on the bench, and realized all at once that he had not even clapped his hands when the Senator finished speaking. What was the matter with him? Was he still mad at Annabelle, or just ashamed because he had been licked by Stotes?

At last Gregory Hilton got up and started out. He took Annabelle's arm again, but still neither of them spoke. Gregory Hilton walked very slowly, peering sharply to right and left. Once he stopped short, looking at a knot of men that had gathered over to one side and were talking in low, threatening voices. Then he looked at Annabelle, seemed to shake his head, and went on.



burne? Tell them you tried to hang a **man** tonight who may have been innocent."

They came at last to the place where the black mare had been hitched, behind the hardware store. Twice Gregory Hilton had paused and looked back, and the trip seemed to take a long time. Now he seemed very slow as he slipped the halter off the mare and shoved the bridle bit between her protesting teeth. Finally he helped Annabelle into the buggy and climbed in himself. Because they were saying nothing, Timothy too was silent, and did not like it. He climbed into his own seat in the back of the buggy. Gregory Hilton clucked at the black mare, and they started out from behind the store and down the street.

A great many people were still milling in the street. There was loud talk and

cursing, and wagons and buggies passing. The black mare had to pick her way slowly and carefully. Stretching his neck to look, Timothy saw that Gregory Hilton seemed to be giving her her head. The reins hung loosely in his hand, and he was peering all the time to the right and left, up alleys and into the crowd.

When they reached the edge of town, Timothy thought Gregory Hilton would speed up the mare, but he did not. Timothy twisted in his seat and looked forward, and saw that Hilton was even holding the mare in now, though, knowing she was headed for home, she was ready and anxious to break into a trot.

For the first time since their fight, Annabelle swallowed her pride and spoke.

"Why don't we go faster?" she said. "What are you waiting for?" Her voice was frightened.

Gregory Hilton did not even answer. His jaw seemed to tighten, and he stared straight ahead. Timothy did not like this. It had not been such a good day after all, and he wanted to get home. Nor could he understand it. There was nothing up ahead. Only cleared land and an empty road, and over to the right, as he remembered it, a clump of oak trees leading down to a creek. What was it that Gregory Hilton was waiting for?

Then Timothy heard voices ahead, in the direction of the oaks. It was quite dark now, a cloudy night, but up there among the trees two or three torches flared, and a dozen men were gathered together in a tight knot about one of the oaks.

Timothy heard the slap of the reins and then the buggy jerked ahead, almost throwing him out. The mare raced until she was abreast the clump of trees, then at Gregory Hilton's pull on the reins, stopped as suddenly as she had started.

"Hold the reins, Annabelle," said Gregory Hilton, and leaped out of the buggy and started on a run toward the knot of men.

Timothy jumped to the ground and started after him. He forgot all about protecting Annabelle. Gregory Hilton was shedding his frock coat as he ran, and Timothy smelled a fight ahead. At once he felt better. Gregory Hilton was going to clean up Stotes after all. This would be fine.

HE saw Gregory Hilton shoving his way roughly through the group of men. They did not want to give way, but they did. Again Timothy himself managed it by squeezing through the spaces between the legs, though it was not easy this time. At last he got to where he could see what was going on in the center of the group. One of the men with torches was right there, and it was a frightening thing he saw:

He knew some of these men, but they were no longer the same men as when he had seen them in the fields or on the threshing floor. Their faces were twisted with fury till they were ugly in the torch-light.

In the center of the group stood Jeremiah Stotes, looking white and scared. A rope ~~was~~ looped around his neck and tossed over a limb of the oak tree. Gregory Hilton stood there too, looking very

angry. He was saying something to the men, but Timothy could not make out what it was, because everybody was cursing and shouting.

Suddenly, Gregory Hilton reached out and grabbed the torch from the hand of the man near him and flung it to the ground. It went out. There were two other torches, but they were outside the circle, and here in the center for a moment, it was very dark.

"What's goin' on here?" somebody growled. "Yank that rope before he gits away. Dammit, Henry, pass up that torch."

Because he was so close, Timothy heard Gregory Hilton's whisper:

"Run, Stotes. You're free."

There was shoving and milling and the sound of running footsteps.

THEN they had another torch in the center, and Timothy's jaw dropped. Stotes was gone and Gregory Hilton had put the rope around his own neck!

"What in hell?" said someone; and another: "By golliess, it's Greg Hilton!"

"That's right," said Gregory Hilton. "It's me. Now go ahead, you blood-thirsty fools, and yank up on that rope."

"Why, confound it," a farmer said, "you let him git away. Where'd he go?"

"I think I heard him," a man said.

Two men started toward the creek, in the direction the footsteps had gone. Gregory Hilton laughed harshly.

"You won't catch him," he said. "Stotes is mighty fast on his feet. But you've got a victim here. Why don't you hang him?"

A big black-bearded man stepped up swiftly and grabbed the rope. He seemed to be the leader.

"Damn you, Hilton," he snarled, "we'll do that! You've stuck your nose in the wrong place tonight."

Gregory Hilton's face was pale in the flickering light. "Go ahead, Jim Pugsley," he said. "I have no fear of you, even with the light of murder in your eyes."

"Come on, boys," said Pugsley. "We'll yank this snoopin' dude to heaven."


Another man stepped forward. "By the Eternal," he said, "we'd ought to do that. You let him git away."

"Then why don't you pull this rope, Washburne?" said Gregory Hilton. "Jim Pugsley needs some help. He's too cowardly to do the job alone. Yank up the rope and then go home. Sneak home and tell your wives and children. Tell them

you tried to hang a man tonight who may have been innocent, and instead you hanged a man you *knew* was innocent."

Washburne moved back a little, not taking the rope. The others shuffled their feet and were silent. A torch sputtered out and was not relit. "Why, confound it," the farmer said again. "Why, Greg—"


Angrily Jim Pugsley tossed the rope aside and shook his fist at Gregory Hilton. "Damn you to hell," he said, "it aint me that's afraid to hang you!" He backed away slowly into the darkness, still cursing.

"All right," said Gregory Hilton. "The Senator let his mouth run away with him. He made a fool of himself, and he's made fools of you. He worked you up to  hanging. But if you haven't got sand enough to hang the man that freed Stotes, then you'd better go home."

"I gonies, he's right," the farmer said. "We been took, and we'd best shut up about it."

"I'd like to start up where the Senator left off," Gregory Hilton said. "This is a mighty fine country, and a mighty fine State. But we're civilized now. We've got laws, and we don't need backwoods lynchings."

"The law don't seem to be punishin' Stotes," grumbled Washburne.

"No; and the law won't till it can prove he's guilty," Hilton said. "It'll take care of him soon enough if that happens. It's time you found out, Washburne, that the law is better any day than  blood-mad lynching-bee."

WASHBURNЕ grunted and moved off, seeming anxious to get out of the torchlight. The others too, sheepishly walked off into the darkness. Now there were only Timothy and Gregory Hilton, the latter with the rope still about his neck. They stood there facing each other in the flickering light of the last torch, which someone had dropped to the ground but not extinguished, and Timothy did not know what to say, and wished he were not there.

Timothy heard footsteps running from the road, sounding like Annabelle's. Then a big form came out of the darkness from down by the creek, and Annabelle's steps seemed to slow and stop a few feet away. Jeremiah Stotes walked into the dancing light. He was breathing heavily, and he looked furtively to right and left before he stepped up to Gregory Hilton.

"I clumb a tree," he said. "They never thought to look. I'm mighty grateful to you, Hilton." He half held up his hand as if to offer it to Hilton.

Gregory Hilton at last moved and tossed the rope from around his neck, but he did not take Stotes' hand.

"You needn't be grateful, Stotes," he said. "If I were the sheriff of this county, I'd have you in jail inside ten minutes."

"If it'll set your mind at ease," Stotes said, "I didn't do it. I might've, but I didn't."

"That's neither here nor there," Gregory Hilton said. And then, all at once, he smiled. "More words," he said. "A dee-vice for to confound fools."

JEREMIAH laughed loudly, so that he shook. He clapped Gregory Hilton on the back with a big hand. "You're all right, Hilton," he chuckled. "I'd vote fer the devil too, if you said the word." And, still chuckling, he walked off into the darkness.

"How does it feel like, Mr. Hilton, being hung?" asked Timothy abruptly, and then wished he had not said it.

But Gregory Hilton had no chance to answer, because just then Annabelle came swiftly into the light. She stopped short there, waited a moment. Then she ran forward.

"Greg! Oh, *Greg*—" she said. And right then she put her arms around him and kissed him full on the lips.

"Oh, you brave darling!" she said. "I was so afraid—"

Timothy knew it was time to get out of here. He slipped away and crawled into the back of the buggy.

A little later Annabelle and Gregory Hilton came back. Annabelle was all starry-eyed as she got into the buggy. Gregory Hilton clucked at the mare again, and she started home at a fast trot.

But Timothy was glad he could sit back here away from them. He knew that Gregory had his arm around Annabelle up there, and they were talking and probably kissing some more. He did not like it. Why hadn't Gregory licked Stotes in the first place? Why didn't he let him get hung? That would have fixed him for knocking Gregory down.

He couldn't see why Annabelle should like Gregory better now. He felt badly let down himself. He did not know whether he liked Gregory Hilton or not.

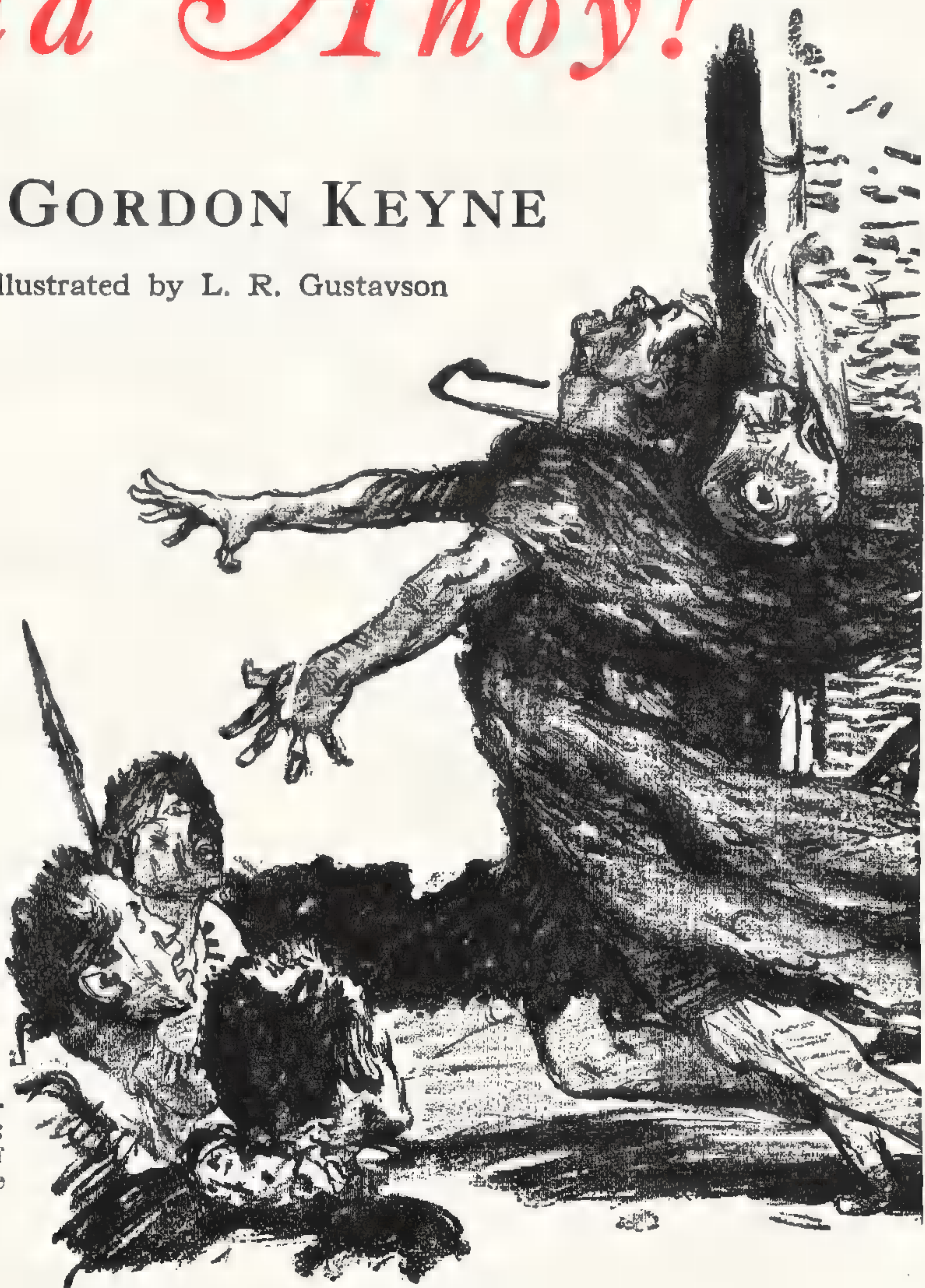
Another story by Chandler Whipple will appear in an early issue.

Gold Ahoy!

By GORDON KEYNE

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

Tripped, flung off-balance, he fell; the huge mask of Keave burst loose and fell away.



The Story Thus Far:

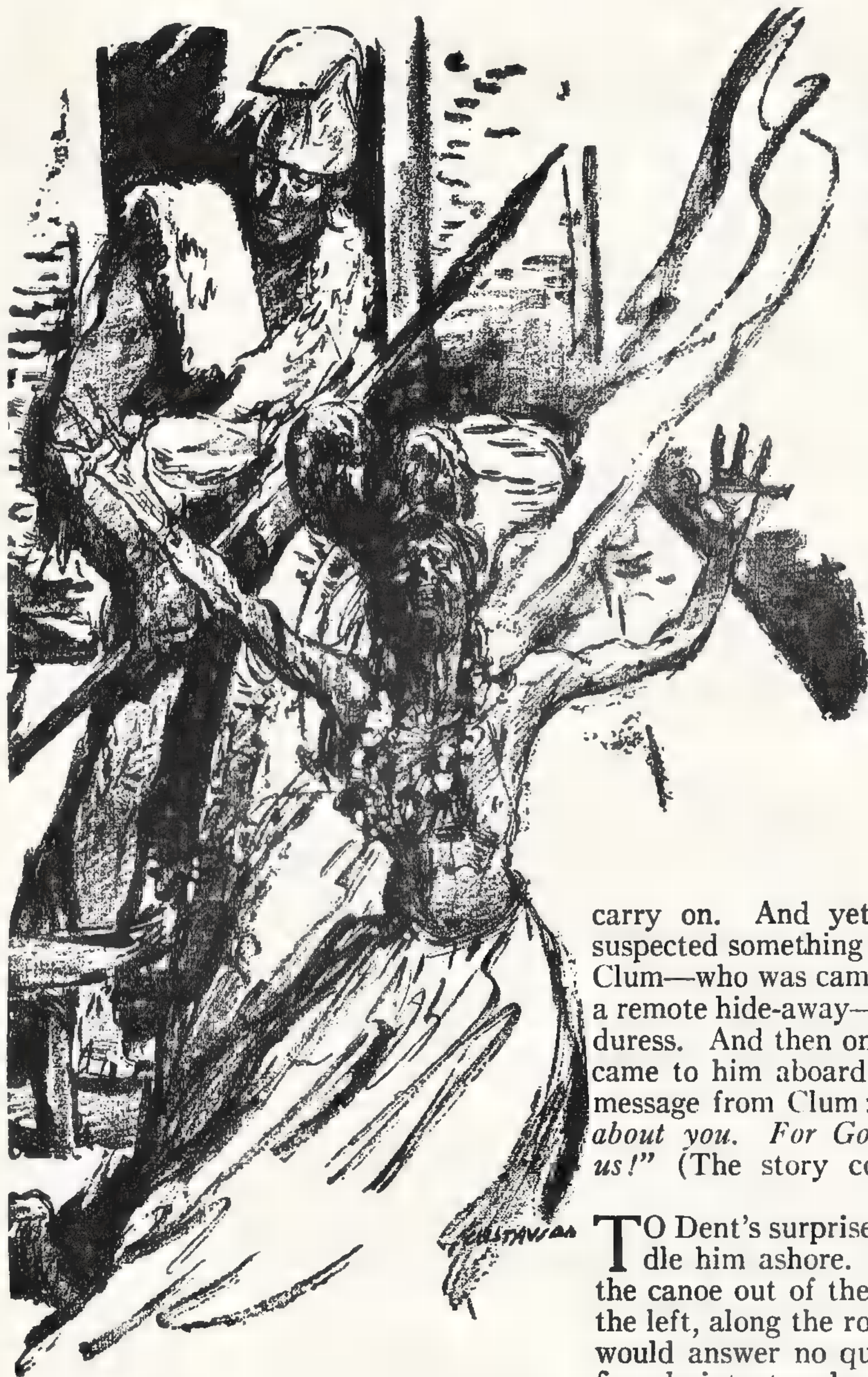
IN the wild San Francisco of gold-rush days, Abner Dent met and befriended Mary Clum, who was masquerading as a boy while she searched for her missing father, Captain Ezra Clum, a shipmaster. Nahiena was her name, she told him—a Sandwich Island name. "My mother was a missionary's daughter there," she told Dent. "We went to Valparaiso when I was a child. Father settled us there; you see, he had his reasons. But Mary's my name also, if you like that better."

Learning that Captain Clum had been shanghaied aboard a ship bound for Honolulu, Nahiena found passage on the *Eliza*, a ship bound for the Sandwich Islands; and Dent signed on as mate.

Before the ship sailed, however, a British soldier of fortune, Sir Francis Fairhaven, sought Dent out and tried to buy his help in a daring scheme—a "play for a throne," he described it.

"Nahiena doesn't know it yet, but she's not Clum's daughter," Sir Francis averred. "She's no more related to him than you are. Her father was a king."

Dent pretended agreement with Sir Francis' terms and scheme—he could protect Mary Clum better that way. Not far from Hawaii a sudden squall wrecked the ship. Sir Francis, Mary Clum and most of the sailors got off in the boats and made shore. Dent, the second mate Saul Gorman, the old Island woman Keave, and Mary's devoted old drunkard



THE struggle for power in the Pacific is not new—as witness this stirring story of a foreign plot to seize Hawaii nearly a century ago.

carry on. And yet—somehow he still suspected something false, suspected that Clum—who was camped with Nahiena in a remote hide-away—was somehow under duress. And then one evening old Keave came to him aboard ship with a strange message from Clum: *"Mary has told me about you. For God's sake, come help us!"* (The story continues in detail:)

TO Dent's surprise, Keave did not paddle him ashore. Instead, she turned the canoe out of the cove and headed to the left, along the rocky lava coast. She would answer no questions, and seemed fiercely intent on her task.

friend—a former actor who was known only as Thady—were left aboard the sinking ship.

They reached shore at last, however, and found Sir Francis pushing on with his scheme. A French trading-schooner had been obtained and armed with a cannon or two. Dent was to command her and a polyglot crew of adventurers. A shot or two ashore, Sir Francis averred, would start the revolt that would give the throne to Nahiena—and the islands to France.

Dent still hung back, but when Sir Francis produced Captain Clum and Nahiena, and Clum confirmed Sir Francis' story that she was really the daughter of a former Island king, Dent agreed to

She came ashore at a sandy stretch in the mouth of a bleak little rocky gorge. Out of the canoe, she squatted and drew a line in the sand with her finger. This, she made him understand, represented the valley that ended in the cove where the schooner was moored. Near the upper end, she punched a hole to represent the camp. Then she punched another.

"*Leiau*," she said, the word for temple. This was her own temple on the hillock. Back from this she again stuck her finger in the sand. "House. Nahiena." From this point she drew an angling line; her words and gestures made Dent comprehend that they were going to the house by another and circuitous route.

Once on their way, old Keave clambered along like a goat, but for Dent it was

tough and exhausting toil. There was no path of any sort, and the lava was tumbled about in fantastic masses filling the floor of the gorge. It was an hour before they reached the upper end of this, coming out upon a high, bare shoulder of rock.

From here the view was glorious. The cove and the schooner were hidden, but against the southern horizon bulked the tremendous masses of Hawaii, green and blue and red in the afternoon sunlight. Far out, past this landmark of all seamen, flickered a spot of white. Staring, Dent felt his heart leap, and wished for the spyglass he had left behind. Some whaler standing up for the northwest, no doubt, and the rendezvous at Oahu; or perhaps to pick up a supply of the huge yams grown on Tauai and Nihau, obtainable nowhere else, which even at sea would keep a long while. Ah, to be on that whaler's deck with New Bedford tongues around, and Clum and Nahiena with him, and this world of lava and lush green and savagery gone and forgotten for ever!

"You come," Keave was saying impatiently; and he followed, passive.

On across the shelf of lava; that naked, rounded shoulder of rock was to linger, fortunately, in his mind. At the edge of it were three little pinnacles like obelisks, of dark brownish rock, distinct from the lava. He passed these closely, then was trailing Keave through a perfect maze of twisted, tortured lava, cracked and fissured everywhere from sudden cooling, carved into a thousand fantastic shapes by erosion. Keave picked her way swiftly among these masses, following no path yet never at a loss. Another gorge, now; a breath of flower-sweetness, such perfume as drifts far out to sea for miles to leeward of the islands, and then a wild scramble along loose rock and rubble.

KEAVE paused and pointed downward. Below, lifted the flower-scent, and Dent glimpsed touches of green. A little valley, hidden away. He glanced inquiringly at Keave.

"Is this the place? Well, go ahead. You know the way."

She shook her head violently.

"*Aole*, no! *Tabu*, *tabu* for me! Not for you. You go now."

There was no longer any tabu in the islands, of course. Probably she had reverted completely to the old days of savagery, when there had been a tabu on the place.

Looking back, Dent saw her grotesque shape, looking after him, watching him. She waved her hand in farewell; then she disappeared.

He went on alone, negotiating the sharp descent with some difficulty.

Below, greenery appeared; an incredibly small, narrow little crevice where a stream dashed recklessly along. He reached it and followed its course. Ahead it widened a trifle; he saw trees, but so thick was the foliage that nothing else appeared, until without warning he came to a ten-foot drop where the stream spouted over into a pool. Green leaves shut out the world.

Dent was streaming with sweat, and weary with his climb; this cool water gleaming in the sunlight tempted him past bearing. He came down to it, shed his clothes, and was in with a leap.

THE fragrant chill was blissful; even with one hand, he could swim well enough, and when at last he pulled himself out on the bank, to sit panting and dripping in the sun, he was like a new man inside. He sat drying, then laced on his hook-harness and got into his clothes, pistols and all.

There was a little trail, a path, at the lower end of the pool, coming out of the greenery. He started for it; as he did so, the leaves parted, and Nahiena appeared. She stepped out into the sunlight and stood stock-still, incredulous, her eyes widening upon him. She tried to speak, and could not.

She wore a thin robe of white; the sunbeams made her seem some creature of a fairy world, with a body of golden glow shrouded in mist, an ethereal vision of loveliness which Dent never forgot.

"You—you're not real!" she gasped. "You can't be!"

"I am. I'll prove it," said Dent, laughing. He did so in the best of all manners, and she clung frantically to him, crying out incoherent words; at last she drew away.

"Don't wait!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Go on, go on. . . . He's sitting there, waiting! He needs you. Go on to him! I was coming to bathe in the pool. We had given you up; he said Keave must have failed in her promise. He bought her help—"

"But it's you I came to see," Dent broke in.

She pushed him away. "No! He wants you, needs you; he wants to talk with you alone. Go on, go on!"

He allowed her to overcome his protests. He walked on down the path. The green leaves swallowed her from sight, and the pool, and all else.

To right and left, lava cliffs stretched up to heaven. He saw that this was merely a tiny cleft amid the bleak rocks. Ahead, the trees and flowers opened out to disclose a house beside the brawling stream—a house of poles and thatch, native style. No one was in sight.

He walked on, around the house. Ahead, the valley dropped away suddenly; above the flowers and brush he saw a lava ridge that seemed to close off the rift in that direction, toward the temple and camp and valley below. These remained invisible. The lava ridge shut off everything.

And here, before the house of poles, sitting staring morosely at the ridge, was Ezra Clum.

He turned, at Dent's steps. He turned, started to his feet, and stood slack-jawed for an instant.

"Hello, Cap'n," said Dent, laughing, and extended his hand.

Clum drew a deep breath.

"Thank God! Welcome, Dent, welcome. Where is she—Keave?"

"Gone her own ways, I guess. Left me to come on alone, after pointing the road. Back way, I reckon."

"Yes; there is a back way, or was," said Clum. "Mary's gone for a swim."

"I met her. She hurried me along. Are you two all alone here?"

"Yes. Sit down. I've some rum. How about a drink?"

"Could do with it."

Clum went into the house, which was a fairly large place. Dent's eyes followed him; Lord, how the man was broken!

He reappeared, with a bottle and little wooden cups. The two men drank; silence had gripped them both, but the rum wakened their faculties.

At last Dent, seated on a woven mat, stretched out and spoke.



"I've waited a long time for this minute," Dent said.

Keave was frantically shrieking as they tore her to pieces; Dent rushed Nahlena into the thatched house.



"Got your note, Cap'n. Too bad I missed you, back at the gold-diggings. Looks like there's a terrible lot of things I don't savvy."

"A lot of things," Clum echoed. His eyes gleamed brightly; he was nervous, feverish with excitement. "I don't rightly know how to begin. Abner Dent of Marblehead, huh? Yes, I used to know your folks, a long time ago."

Dent got out his pipe and lit up.

"Might start with the most important," he observed. "If you hadn't said, the other day, that Mary wasn't your daughter, I'd not have believed it."

Cap'n Clum's features jerked convulsively, as though the words had wrenched at him.

"It was a damned lie," he said, with a groan.

"Good!" Dent smiled. "Then that's settled for good and all. Not that it'd matter to me, but it matters a lot to her. She sets a lot o' store by her father."



Well, you just steam ahead any way that suits you, sir."

For a moment the old Ezra Clum, stalwart and unbending, leaped forth.

"I aint used to being made a fool of, let me tell you! It hurts to tell, Dent; it hurts. I got shanghaied, and it wasn't any accident. I woke up at sea; and then what? Well, they took me properly in hand!"

"The *Mortimer*. An English brig," said Dent. "They were British, then."

"Aye, and they had their orders," said Clum grimly. "At Honolulu I was handed over in irons to some Frenchmen. The blasted froggies kept me in irons aboard a lousy tub that lay in harbor; I stayed there, too, until Sir Francis Fairhaven showed up." A snarl writhed his lips.

Upon Dent broke a faint realization of what this man had endured during those long weeks. Ezra Clum was not one to submit meekly to such a fate. Kept in irons—the fact was eloquent. He whistled softly.

"You must have fought back, Cap'n."

"Aye; and I was a fool," replied Clum gloomily, bitterly. "When that blasted Fairhaven showed up, I was in a bad way. I still am. He gave me my choice; back him up, says he, work with him, and all's well. Refuse, and I'd be shipped off on a whaler. And he had Mary in his hands, gave me proof of it. For her safety, d'ye see? I got a week's run ashore, after I

agreed; had no choice. Backed up his story to the French consul and the others. Then on here. And now things are worse. No hope at all, except you can do something. Mary's told me all about you. I'm done—but you're young and strong, like I was once."

The man's agony began to show through the slow, awkward speech.

The threads tightened in Dent's grasp. Aware of the old story about Cap'n Clum, Sir Francis had seized upon it, avidly. An heir to the throne! Here was all he needed, all the French needed to step in and grab the islands. This fact, if rightly built up, put the game into their hands.

And Sir Francis had proceeded to build it up. The appearance of Keave in San Francisco must have been a godsend to him; during the long time the *Eliza* lay there without a crew, the old crone had been won over to the scheme—bought over, rather. It did not matter a jot that Mary Clum was Ezra Clum's daughter, that she was no native, that no such native child had existed; here was no need for documentary evidence. The old story, the word of Clum, the corroboration of Keave, would serve to put her in power. And once the French had a grip on the islands, all hell would not pry them loose!

"My wife and I lived here for years, after we were supposed to have left the islands," said Clum. "Mary, our oldest child, was born here. We had a hard time, back in those days; the young king did what the missionaries told him; so did the queens who ran the islands. Chiefly Kinua, the daughter of the great Kamehameha. She's dead now. The missionaries are out o' power; nothing matters any more. And that devil Fairhaven—used to be a partner of mine, he did, after I had moved the family down to Valparaiso."

Dent stirred, glanced up in sharp surprise. Here was something new.

"A partner?"

Clum looked dourly at the distant lava ridge. He was broken, badly broken.

"I wouldn't have Mary know it." He forced out hesitant words. "I wouldn't have her think ill of me. He knows that, the devil! It was one of his threats—to tell her."

ABNER DENT smoked on, silent now, waiting. The curtain of the past was being rolled back, and he felt a touch of actual fear. He could sense something terrible coming into view; he

could catch the shivery hideous feeling of horror that held Ezra Clum as in a vise.

"Never say that the past don't come to roost," went on Clum's slow voice. "Never say it don't hang over you like a buzzard! It does."

He paused again, took a deep breath.

"I needed money badly, once. I went into the guano islands trade with this devil of a limey. Taking Chinese out o' Canton, stuffing 'em under hatches by the hundred with fat promises; turning 'em over at the guano islands into slavery, to be worked to death inside a year. That was the hell's business we were in. I got out of it, aye, but too late. And now my wife's dead, my whole family's dead, except for Mary; and that devil has us hard and fast."

His chin sank on his chest; his big hands, shrunken now, flittered about his knees.

"Don't be nonsensical about it, Cap'n," spoke out Dent, his voice seeming very loud upon that silence. "Walk out of the whole thing; you and she can do it. Refuse point-blank, and quit him."

CLUM gave him a scornful look from flaming, tortured eyes.

"You fool, we're under guard here! Stowed away like chain in a locker. You don't know what he's threatened—about her! And he'd do it. He's got women of his own; he's just a cold-blooded devil; he'd leave her wrecked and broken and done for, and never turn a hair. No! The only chance is to get away, escape. And how to do it? I dunno. There aint a chance, seems like. I'm all gone to pieces. That's why I worked on Keave to get you here—promised her all sorts of nonsense, and I'll have to keep my word. You've got to get Mary out of this—you've got to do something! I could, when I was your age, but now I'm used up."

Used up; that expressed it with fearful pathos, thought Dent.

Fear was pricking at him. He saw more and more clearly what the situation was. Willy-nilly, Nahiena was to be used as a puppet; if not voluntarily, then as a helpless shattered thing. There would be no mercy. She was essential.

"Where's our friend Thady?" spoke out Dent abruptly.

Ezra Clum snorted. "Thady? I thought maybe he'd lend a hand; but no use. He's mad as a hatter about playing king. Mad!" repeated Clum. "It's gone to his damned head. You ought to

see him cavorting around that temple! Used to be a play-actor, he did; not a bad sort—in fact he was a good man in his way, back in Californy. He and most of the men have scattered out to villages among the hills; Sir Francis let 'em go—the Island girls. Thady and his women—my good God!”

Clum spat in disgust.

“MARY could have won him over,” said Dent.

“Arrgh! Maybe. I wouldn't let her try.”

“Do you know that she, as queen, is to marry Keave's grandson?”

“Aye. That's the hell of it,” said Clum, and suppressed a groan. “Nothing I can do. If I killed that devil Fairhaven, the French would still put the whole game over. Keave would do it herself, blast her! Lucky, she doesn't suspect why I wanted to see you.”

“Does Mary know about it?”

“Mary knows everything, now,” Clum replied. “That is, nearly everything; not about me and the Chinese trade. You won't tell her that. She acts cheerful and agreeable, and so do I. Fairhaven was here this morning; all's pleasant enough. We've got him fooled.”

“Perhaps,” said Abner Dent. “So have I, but not for long. . . . Put a pistol to his head and march him away with us? Wouldn't work. Kill him? Would do us no good. Escape? Not a blind man's chance. We'd not get away from those natives.”

“Not much. They're worse'n you know, Dent. That blasted Fairhaven has lied to them proper. They're all for the plot. Why? In order to get rid of white men. These last years, the Island population has died off by the thousand. These chiefs blame the missionaries and the whites—all sorts of disease and sickness. Now they're worked up to kicking out all whites. They don't realize that the French are coming to stay.”

The two men sat in silence. Then Abner Dent was aware of a queer thing, which inspired a new and more acute feeling of horror. Ezra Clum had begun to chuckle. Laughter was bubbling within him; a queer, mirthless laughter that chilled Dent's blood.

“What's the joke?” he demanded.

Clum turned to him. “I know what Fairhaven doesn't know,” he replied. “Picked it up in Honolulu. Nobody else knows it yet. Something that makes his whole damned plot impossible! Some-

thing that'd make the French drop it like a hot cake!”

Dent sat up. “Then let's have it, in God's name, man!”

“Not by a damned sight.” Clum stiffened. “No! Not till I can tell that devil face to face! Not till the right time comes, and I can blow away his whole house o' cards with one word! Not till I see him broken by what I tell him!”

“Use your head!” snapped Dent angrily. “If you know something, let's have it, let's use it! I tell you straight, Cap'n, there's not one atom of hope that I can see, for us all. He's got us where he wants us. If we cut loose, he'll go to extremes. He'd think nothing of killing you or me. For Mary's sake, we've got to use our heads! What's your secret?”

Clum's hideous inner mirth had died away. He shook his head.

“No. It wouldn't help us one jot, Dent. It's merely something I know, and as yet he or others don't know. If I told him, he'd get around it some way, be sure o' that. He wouldn't let it spoil his plans! I tell you, he's a devil. After you and Mary get away from all this—then's when I want to tell him, crush him, break him down!”

“You act like a galled whale,” Dent exclaimed, his voice edged with irritation. “If you really know something—”

Clum ignored him completely.

“Or perhaps,” he continued, “perhaps the time to tell him is when he thinks success lies dead ahead! Then tell him, put his helm hard over, let him go slap on the reefs! Aye, that might be better still. If I could just know Mary's away, out of his reach! That's your job, Dent. I'll trust her to you.”

Dent stifled an oath.

“Blast it, how often must I tell you there's no earthly chance?” he broke out hotly, and slapped the pistols at his belt. “Get him alone and put a bullet in him! I'd do that, quick enough, but it'd get us nothing at all unless you could see some way—”

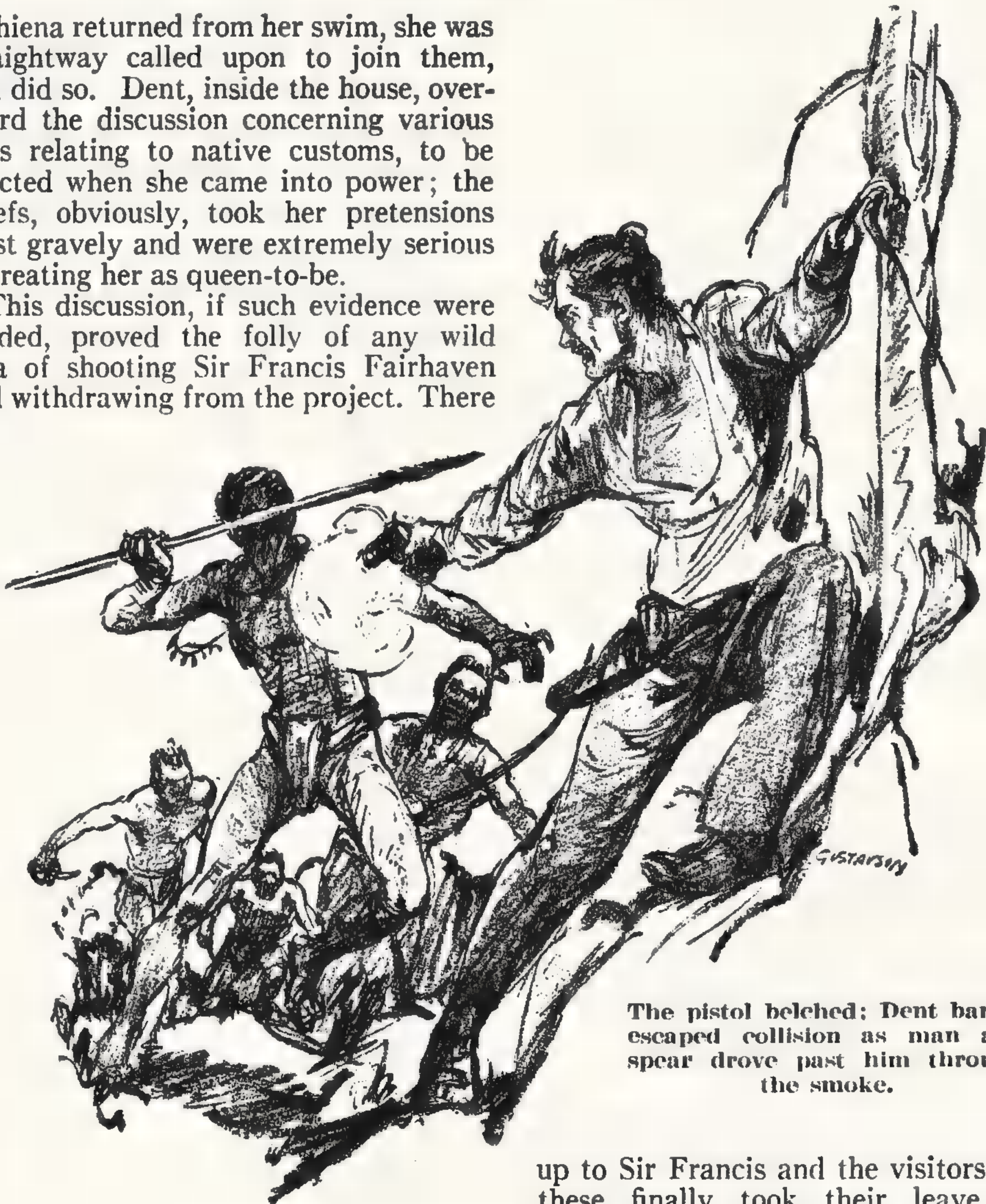
“Belay!” Captain Clum came to his feet. He stooped, peering at the lava ridge. “Get into the house! Hide there, anywhere—here comes that devil now!”

Chapter Fifteen

SIR FRANCIS, accompanied by six native chiefs who spoke English well, remained talking on the mats before the house until twilight gathered. When

Nahiena returned from her swim, she was straightway called upon to join them, and did so. Dent, inside the house, overheard the discussion concerning various laws relating to native customs, to be enacted when she came into power; the chiefs, obviously, took her pretensions most gravely and were extremely serious in treating her as queen-to-be.

This discussion, if such evidence were needed, proved the folly of any wild idea of shooting Sir Francis Fairhaven and withdrawing from the project. There



The pistol belched; Dent barely escaped collision as man and spear drove past him through the smoke.

could now be no withdrawal. The temper of these chiefs was savagely set against all whites. They had been worked up to a pitch of massacre, and were not taking orders from Sir Francis either. They were willing enough to accept his proffered support by the French for the *coup d'etat*, on his voluble assurances that the French would then withdraw. The fact that whites were very largely in control of Oahu and even of the government at Honolulu, infuriated them, and they regarded Sir Francis as an ally but by no means as a brother. All this was illuminating to Dent.

"The limey's right about one thing," he reflected. "There'll be hell to pay at Honolulu if the French do get control—and plenty of bloodshed!"

He was astonished at the way in which Clum and Nahiena—a yellow feather cloak flung over her shoulders—played

up to Sir Francis and the visitors; when these finally took their leave, Dent emerged from his retreat and dryly congratulated the girl; she was grave now, and her laughter was stilled.

"We do what we must, Abner," she said. "Now that you're here, everything will be all right. I'll go and get supper ready."

"You'll stay here the night?" spoke up Ezra Clum. "Aye, you've no choice. Well, I'm glad to have an honest face about! And we'll get somewhere before we sleep, with plans for the morrow."

Stay the night? Dent could do nothing else! To return to the ship was impossible, without guidance, and Keave was not here. Now it came to him for the first time that he might be missed, that his absence from the schooner might be reported to Sir Francis; trouble would be precipitated instantly, in that event. And he wanted desperately to avoid any trouble, any crisis, until he could see some way of escape from this dead end.

He said as much, when they were sitting about the supper table by the light of a whale-oil lamp. Clum made no comment, but Nahiena—Dent now thought of her thus, rather than by her real name—looked up at him with a swift, intent glance.

"Why?" she demanded. "Why must you see some way out before making trouble?"

"Common sense," said Dent.

"There's no common sense anywhere in this affair," she declared. "It's anything but common sense. It's wild, romantic, fantastic! That's why it does have a certain appeal. Yes, I confess that it does. And it does to you too, Abner." Her smile suddenly flashed out. "You won't admit it, but you know it does. Only you're too hard-headed to think about any such thing."

Dent grunted. "Maybe. Sorry?"

"No, I'm not. Under all this romantic delusion there's something terrible," she said soberly. "Like looking into a cool and lovely reef pool, and finding a huge octopus at the bottom, waiting."

Clum's tortured eyes flickered at them. "That's it," he said. "That's it exactly, my dear! Dent, what's the way out? You must know, you must!"

"A ship's deck and a scrap of canvas," said Dent. He thought of the sail he had seen that afternoon from the mountain shoulder; longing for that white deck wrenched at him.

"You have a schooner," rasped Clum.

"True. Can the three of us reach her and steal off in her, without these Kana-kas knowing? Don't be absurd. Even if we got to sea in her, could we handle her? Impossible."

The girl's eyes searched him. "Abner, I didn't know anything could seem impossible to you! Don't you ever get hare-brained and reckless and ready to venture anything—like Sir Francis?"

"No," said Abner Dent, curtly. "Not unless it's forced on me, that is."

THIS was true, and hot resentment of the fact quivered within him as they sat into the night, talking—and getting nowhere. With grave searchings, he admitted this flaw in himself. Sir Francis might try to pull down the moon and might even do so. He himself could not, unless the need were forced upon him. No use arguing; he might achieve the impossible, but never by choice. Never unless he had to do it, as he had kept the *Eliza* afloat.

"I'm just a plain matter of fact Marbleheader," he told himself, later, as he stretched out on the mat assigned him. "I guess that's all. Let's hope something will turn up tomorrow. If it doesn't, and Sir Francis finds I'm here, hell will break loose! Somehow, I can't think out things and make plans. . . . I don't see a gleam of hope anywhere here. Nary a one!"

He fell asleep, thinking of the falling star he had seen from the barque's deck. A fine sort of promise that had turned out to be! No recapturing that instant of ecstasy now; the bare memory of it was sour in his mind.

WITH morning, he went off to the pool under the fall and was dressing again when Ezra Clum appeared unexpectedly.

"I used to swim there, too," he said, watching Dent strap on the harness of the iron hook. "Is that thing sharp?"

"Too sharp," said Dent, glancing down at the hook. "It wears sharp. I have to round it off with a file every so often. What got you up so early? I sneaked out so as not to wake you folks up."

"Couldn't sleep." Cap'n Clum rubbed his bristly chin. "Real red sky this morning; guess you know the old tag."

"Red sky at morning, sailors take warning!" Dent laughed as he repeated it. "Looking for weather?"

"Dummed if I know what. No weather, this season. Looky, Dent! Those agents in Frisco have my money. It's fixed so's Mary can get it, if anything goes wrong."

"We know; they said so. You buck up, Cap'n," Dent said. "This business will come out all right."

"You see to it that it does," said Cap'n Clum. "Glad you're a Marbleheader, Dent. I'm a mighty weary man; all used up, seems like. Got a bad taste in my mouth this morning. See here, an idea struck me. If you got into this place by the back way, couldn't we slip out that way?"

"It's possible. Did you know there was a back way?"

"No. All rock and lava, I thought."

"Correct, Cap'n. Even if I could find the way we got in, which I doubt, and even if we reached the shore and the canoe Keave left there, which is more doubtful, what good would it do? Those natives would run us down in no time at all. We'd get nowhere in a canoe. But I'm willing to try it if you say the word."

"Then I say it," rasped Ezra Clum. "After that blasted temple ceremony this

morning. . . . Mary must be there, so I'm going along to keep an eye on things. You'd better go too."

Dent's brows lifted. "What? And meet the limey?"

"You won't. I ~~was~~ there yesterday morning. You and I can stow away. To tell you the truth, it aint to keep an eye on things that I'm going," he broke out suddenly. "It's to give Keave a hand. I promised her I would, if she got that note to you and fetched you. We can stow away in a place I've got to be. Tell you later. Yes?"

Dent sat down to put on his shoes. Impulse rushed upon him, caution fled. Wait till necessity was forced on him? A coward's way!

"Yes!" he exclaimed. "Yes! It's a bargain!"

"Good. Here's Mary now. I'll be at the house. . . . Breakfast—"

Muttering excitedly, Ezra Clum walked off. Dent looked up to see Nahiena, again in her white robe. She came to him, smiling, and kissed him as he rose.

"Just had a swim myself," he said. "I'm off and out of your way—"

"Wait." She checked him. "You've talked with my father?"

"Yes. I'm going to the temple with him."

"I'm glad of that. He's frightfully despondent this morning; he said that he wanted only to shout one thing at Sir Francis before he died. He talked very queerly; I'm afraid of what he may do."

"I'll keep him in hand," said Dent reassuringly. "What is this one thing he knows?"

"He wouldn't tell me. I think it makes him furious, too," she added, "that I'm going to turn myself into a brown girl."

"Oh!" said Dent. "When?"

"Now. As soon as you go."

"Then good luck—I always did like Nahiena! And here's proof of it!"

HE came to the house, presently, and found Ezra Clum limping up and down by the stream. Now, at Dent's questions, Clum explained about those guards. Two of the Honolulu Company were down yonder at the lava ridge; not to keep Clum and Mary in, but to keep all others out. So, at least, Sir Francis had said, but Clum snorted disapproval.

"*Aloha, nui nui aloha!*" came a voice, and Keave appeared before them. The skull twisted in her hair now bore a plume of scarlet feathers, increasing her grotesque appearance. She ignored Dent,

squatted down before Clum, fastened her beady eyes on him, and spoke with him in Kanaka. He seemed to know the island tongue well.

AFTER a bit he turned from her, beckoned Dent, and they went into the house to breakfast on fruit.

"Here's the point," said Clum. "She's running her temple show in the ancient way. In the center of the main court there's what they call an *anu*—a frame of wicker shaped like an obelisk, five foot square. The priestess stands in front of it, after the sacrifices, and the god speaks from inside it. Like an oracle, I expect. I'm to be the god."

"Oh!" said Dent, astonished at the crudity of this religious trickery. "But haven't these chiefs too much sense to swallow such a fraud?"

Clum merely sniffed. "Wait and see. She's told me what to say—lot of rot. She's taking the three of us when Mary gets back. She'll smuggle us in somehow. Ceremony aint for a spell yet. That big blasted oaf Thady will be strutting around, condemn him!"

Gorman too, thought Dent, and he explained the rôles taken by the two men. Inadvertently, while speaking of Gorman, he mentioned the man's reluctance for the task, and his tale of an ominous dream. Ezra Clum stared at him.

"Blood all around, naked squirming men? Aye, Dent!" His hand fell on Dent's arm. "Look here! God help us all if those Kanakas do discover the trickery! Unchristian, that's what it is. Gorman's right. This old she-devil Keave has no more scruple about tricking her own people than a cat would have; she's safe enough to keep things in hand, but if she makes a slip—"

He drew back and passed a hand across his eyes. "Oh, it's all nonsense!" he added wearily. "Let's hope something will turn up. We can get back here, then make a break for it and get away. You'll not go back on that plan?"

"Not I," said Abner Dent quietly.

The four of them went down the vale together, Keave and Cap'n Clum ahead, Dent following with Nahiena; her father detested the name, but to Dent it was sheer music. She was ready now for her rôle—her skin browned, flowers wreathing her, the yellow cloak about her shoulders and in her hand a curiously beautiful fan of feathers, pearl and tortoise-shell.

"Does that brown stuff come off easily?" Dent inquired.

"Yes. With water." She looked at him, sidelong, with a slightly impish smile. "You don't like me this way, Abner? Well, it's the last time, I promise you! Some day you'll think back and say: 'Why, I knew the woman when she was a queen! Aye, a queen of the cannibal islands! And if it hadn't been for me, she might have been a really truly queen!' And then you'll be sorry."

Dent grinned. "Maybe. Except for me, you'd be back in California now."

"That's what you think!" She laughed softly. "You engaged our passage, yes; but even before you did so, Sir Francis had spoken to Cap'n Whidden and had a place reserved."

"The devil he did! Then he had expected all along to get you aboard the barque!"

"He told me about it. Yes. He thought it was a good joke."

Dent made no response.

THE little valley narrowed again, all the while descending. Ahead showed bleak lava, the stream cutting away to the left. A twist of the path, and behind them was nothing but naked rock; the tiny gorge was swallowed up in the mountainside.

"You'll see the temple in a minute," said Nahiena presently. "It's just over the ridge—"

Keave's voice rose from ahead, shrill, imperative. The girl leaped into a run and was gone; here was a well-defined path among masses of rock and lava, but so broken was the ground that Dent could catch no sight of the others.

Not, at least, until he came to a bare, open space. Then he halted abruptly.

This was the top of the lava ridge, the ground falling away beyond, the hillock with the temple rising into view. But here on the ridge stood Sir Francis.

He was not alone; with him were two of the company, musket-armed. He was just sending them along down the path, with Keave and Nahiena. Apparently Ezra Clum had stopped him, for they were standing close together. Sir Francis was calling something after his two men. Nahiena turned, with a wave of her fan; Dent knew that this gesture was for him, but Sir Francis took it for himself and bowed.

Keave and Nahiena disappeared. The two men loitering after them disappeared. Sir Francis turned and spoke to Captain Clum, and Dent grinned suddenly. He understood now what had taken place.

"Got his wits about him, Clum has!" he reflected cheerfully. "He grabbed the moment and now it's ours. What'll we do with it, eh?"

He waited. Clum had detained Sir Francis on some pretext; the two were talking. Just as well, thought Dent, to let those two guards get out of earshot. He stayed where he was, though Clum was peering anxiously about as though in search of him. He was conscious of a quivering somewhere inside him; an involuntary, eager quivering, such as seizes upon a dog when the quarry is sighted. He had forgotten about the hill and the temple, now so close, and even about the broken man who stood peering for him and babbling. He heard Sir Francis lift his voice in sharp accents.

"I think you're mad, Clum! Quite mad! There's nothing that can stop—"

Dent heard no more. He started out from among the masses of stone, striding toward the two ahead. His gaze was cheerful, those square-cut features of his were cheerful; one would have said he was extremely happy about something. And so he was. He had even forgotten the pistols belted under his jacket.

Ezra Clum saw him coming, and fell silent, slack-jawed and staring. Sir Francis, conscious of the stare, swung around. He saw Dent, and a look of sheer incredulity came into his handsome, trap-mouth face; his blue eyes widened.

"Hullo!" he cried out in astonishment. "You! And where in the devil's name did you spring from?"

Dent laughed and came on. "Oh, I've been exploring a bit," he responded lightly. "Hello, Cap'n Clum! Did I interrupt your conversation?"

Ezra Clum grinned, but without any humor at all.

"Aye, you did," he said in a hungry voice. "I was on the point of telling him what I wouldn't tell you."

SIR FRANCIS glanced swiftly from one to the other. His blue eyes narrowed, as he took warning; in a flash, the man was cold, dangerous, alert.

"What's all this?" he rapped out. "Damme if you two aren't in collusion!"

"You've hit it," said Dent, and laughed again as he met the blue blazing eyes. Sir Francis looked at him for a long moment, then shifted his gaze to Clum.

"Well? If you're sane, let's have it," he said in a low voice. "There's nothing can stop the islands being seized by the French—nothing!"

"But I say there is." Ezra Clum straightened a little. The shadow of his old stalwart self fell upon him, with a touch of dignity. "D'ye know a man named Wylie, at Honolulu?"

"Wylie? That rascally Scot who's wormed himself into the King's confidence, and plays at being minister of foreign affairs?" A touch of scorn curled his lips. "I know him. What of him?"

"Why, just this!" said Clum, mouthing the words with relish. "Just this, Frank Fairhaven! He's concluded a secret treaty with the United States of America! Aye, and a strong one it is—by which the United States has taken the Sandwich Islands under its protection! It'll be made public soon enough, and if you or your damned French friends reach out to grab, your fingers will be burned to the quick! Now swallow that!"

He paused for breath. Sir Francis stood stiffly, his face growing white.

"YOU and your blasted intrigues and lies—all waste effort!" went on Clum, a deep ring in his voice. "You can go back to the guano island trade, mister! You'll not lie my daughter into any such dishonesty as you intend. You'll get nothing at Honolulu. Your French friends won't dare back you up, won't dare take action themselves—"

Sir Francis swung around at him with out-lashing arm. His fist caught Ezra Clum in the mouth; that blow, like a whip-crack, knocked Clum sprawling.

"You damned impudent—"

Dent's hook took Sir Francis by the shirt-front and coat, jerked him about, held him at arm's length.

"I've waited a long while for this minute," he said.

Sir Francis clutched at the hook to tear it free; but Dent drew him closer.

"I don't like cheaters, as I told you once—"

A fist crashed into his mouth and staggered him. But he only began to shake, slowly, steadily, up and back. Blow after blow smashed into him, until the man's two fists could no longer find their mark, until the head of Sir Francis was rocking as he was more violently jerked back and forth. Then Dent began to drive in his right hand, pulling his victim into each battering fist-hammer; for all the weight and agility and power of the Englishman, he was off balance and practically helpless now.

The hook was sharp; it tore through the cloth; it tore free. But Dent, master

of that cruel hook, stepped in and flipped it up, once. The rounded angle of steel struck Sir Francis under the point of his long English jaw, and dropped him cold.

Ezra Clum was on his feet, limping forward. He halted amazedly.

"I never saw the like—never!" he gasped out. "Dent, that man could master a mutinous crew with his bare hands, and you treated him like a child! It's past belief!"

"There's the proof." Dent stirred the limp figure with his foot, and met the gaze of Clum. "Now what? I've a pistol, if you want to use it. I don't."

A flush stole into Clum's face.

"Wipe your mouth," he said harshly. "It's bleeding."

Dent put the back of his hand to his split lip, and grinned faintly.

"He could hit, all right. Well?"

"I'm no murderer. No more'n you are," said Ezra Clum almost regretfully. "There's a patch of rocks. . . . What say we tie him up and leave him till we come back, after the temple thing is done with? Then we can settle with him, one way or another. Maybe walk him along out of all this—maybe not. When the mumbo-jumbo humbug is all over, likely we'll be able to think what to do."

"He'll wake up."

"Let him. Let him holler his head off! No one can hear him. No guards now. Oh, but you certainly gave it to him! Good for you, Marbleheader! I'll tie him hand and foot with bits of his own clothes, and if he gets loose he'll be a good one! What say?"

"I'm satisfied," said Dent. "You want to do it, eh? Go ahead."

He got out his pipe, managed to strike a light, and puffed contentedly as he watched the operation. Then he helped carry Sir Francis into the shade of the rock masses near by, and left him, still limp and unconscious.

Afterward, looking back at it all, he felt a shiver of horror at the workings of destiny. But how could he or Clum know of the fate so close upon them?

Chapter Sixteen

THE temple on the flat hillock proved not to be on a hillock after all. From below it seemed on a hill; from the top, however, it proved to be built at the crest of a lava bluff that dipped sharply in front to the camp and the valley beyond. At the rear stretched only desolate

twisted formations of lava running up to nothing, apparently.

Thus, one standing before the temple had an extraordinary view over the valley and out to sea, a sense of spacious sunlit glory. But, at the back, the opposite impression was received. Here was only a grotesque maze of lava running back up a sharp grade, with mountains closing in all around. One felt oppressed, hemmed in, choked.

The priests of the ancient gods had once formed a distinct class. Now that the old gods were gone, this class had gone; Keave was alone in her distinction. In the little time given her, however, she had effected wonders with this temple, shut up and laid under a *tabu* and unvisited these many years. Since it had been merely shut up, and not damaged or touched otherwise, she had probably found it almost intact, or perhaps its precious things had been hidden and stored away, as at her cavern retreat on Hawaii to the southward.

HERE in the morning sunlight, with some hundreds of hesitant and awed natives filing up from the camp of the Honolulu Company below, it was a place of glowing color and richness and life. The older men among these natives recognized every detail of the temple and explained to the younger chiefs and men, most of whom had no memory of the olden gods. And upon them all, Christian or pagan, hovered a superstitious dread as they approached this *leiau*, where anciently the bones of the Island chieftains had been laid away.

The temple enclosure consisted of roofless walls eight feet high, formed of loose stones fitted together and in ruin at many points. At the center of the south face, looking over the valley and the sea, was an opening; here two eight-foot walls, barely three feet apart, ran into the center of the great square, forming the only entrance. At the end this alley was closed by a curtain of tapa-cloth.

The natives drifted in by groups, each chief with his followers, armed with anything from clubs or muskets to fishing-spears. Once past the curtain, they found themselves in the main temple court. At the far end of this was a semi-circle of loose stones piled to the height of four feet, with one central opening. This low wall enclosed the sacred inner court, and along its semi-circle were low pillars of curiously carved wood upholding images of the gods.

"They've gone,"
whispered Nahiena.
"They'll come
back," said Dent.



This inner court was not large, and was clearly visible over the low wall. It held the holy of holies—a structure of poles with only one opening in its front, built right against the high outer wall. Before this house-opening stood the wicker *anu*, decorated with tufts of feathers. Around the unbroken walls of the house were stationed more images of island deities; here were those Keave had brought from Hawaii, and others sacred to this place. Cries of wonder and awe arose as the older men recognized them and told what they were.

The wicker obelisk, standing out before the house entrance, was the abode of the oracle-god. Within the shadowy depths of that house of poles were laid away the bones of old kings and chieftains, each bundle neatly wrapped and accompanied by the weapons and garments it had used in life. These were not, of course, visible; but the clacking tongues of the old men rose in shrill description of everything, seen and unseen. The house was in bad repair, with sagging thatch; its walls were held together by withes and stout creepers binding the poles. Keave had done this herself.

The entire extent of the inner court was covered by huge and highly valuable mats of the rare Tauai and Nihau weave. The outer court was paved with flat lava pieces rudely fitted together. Out in front of the *anu* of the oracle burned a

fire, its smokeless flames almost invisible in the sunlight; a pile of fuel stood beside it.

More and more natives came filtering in at the narrow entrance. The Kanakas of the younger generation regarded this place with awe and fear, but not with reverence; yet veneration was in their blood, and swiftly it began to take hold upon them.

Groups of white men, by two and three, had come from the camp below, for Keave had issued a special invitation to the Company of Honolulu to be present. Not many were here, about a dozen in all, because some were still absent at scattered villages.

INTO the sacred inner court only the chiefs and their immediate retainers entered; thus, said the old men, ran the custom of former days. They sat on the mats and waited, while the larger court behind rapidly filled.

Some lit pipes and smoked, with the curious deep-lunged inhalations that the whalers called "Oahu puffs"; but the use of tobacco, thanks to the missionaries, was limited. The white men stared about, talked, laughed together. In the hot sunlight of midday the eager Kanaka voices rose steadily, as one after another the grinning shapes of the gods were recognized and discussed.

Suddenly, with no warning or preliminary, old Keave appeared in the house entrance. She came out, passed the *anu*, circled the fire and squatted there, her back to the audience. In one hand she carried a bundle wrapped in crimson, in the other one of royal yellow; these were seen to be feather cloaks wrapped about something.

Across the fire from her, at the front of the wicker *anu* stood the figure of Tari, the god of war peculiar to Kamehameha the Great. Keave prostrated herself before this figure. She wore, over her withered frame, a cloak of *ti* leaves, scorched and burned about the edges, such a robe as only a priest might wear.

Her voice, addressing the god, was really an address to the hundreds now gathered in this place, and it was adroit in the extreme.

These men, in large part educated in the mission schools, were far from savages; they were, on the contrary, very shrewd. Many had traveled afar. Perhaps for this reason they were the easier to inflame. Keave whipped up resentment of their wrongs, real or fancied.

She stripped off the veneer of civilization with magic words. She told how the race was dying out rapidly, how it was now the time for the old gods to return and save their people, and how with French support the kingdom might be taken over at one blow by a queen of the blood royal.

As she spoke, a boy seated against the rear wall thudded a drum with his hand, not loudly but with never a break. The steady reiteration chimed with her words, its hypnotic effect took hold of the mind. Here and there a man, then others, began to sway back and forth; grunts broke out. A chief leaped to his feet and made a brief but impassioned harangue, and sat down again to a burst of applause. Then another. Keave continued her invocation to the god of war.

The drum, unheard yet definitely felt, continued its thudding beat. The entire mass of seated men were now rocking back and forth in time to the sound and to the cadenced words of the priestess. Men pointed, nudged one another, uttered low exclamations of amazement; her cloak of leaves, carelessly doffed and shoved away, was lying half in the little fire. Yet it was unconsumed, untouched by the flames!

Abruptly, Keave finished her address, rose, and shook powder from a gourd over the fire. Smoke puffed up, and across the audience drifted the perfume of sandalwood. She picked up the bundle wrapped in the red feather cloak and opened it, to display a skull and white bones.

"Keave!" she cried out. "Keave, the ancient king! Keave, the god! This is his cloak, these are his bones! He comes again to look upon you, to look upon his land—"

She went on to revive old legends, old stories of the god. Awe and wonder seized upon the sitting throngs. Within the closely woven wicker cubicle, the *anu* of the oracle, Ezra Clum nudged Dent, who sat beside him, seeing yet unseen.

"The old witch is smart, eh? They've all heard about the happenings at the cavern over in Hawaii; here it's daylight, and her tricks are twice as effective!"

DENT nodded, peering out at those weaving figures, those set faces, those rolling eyes. Keave was piling more fuel on the fire. Swiftly, she held up the yellow bundle and then tore it open. Another skull, more bones.

"Kamehameha!" lifted her voice, echoed by grunts and cries from the audi-

ence. She told of the hero who had first united all the islands; they were looking upon his actual bones. Here she was closer to known fact. Many of those present had seen the conqueror, had known him. Excitement grew upon these men. The years had fallen away from them and they were savages once more.

A groan, a wild inchoate protest, burst from them. Keave had dropped upon the fire the red cloak, with its contents, then the other one. The odor of singed feathers arose, to be dissipated by more of the sandalwood incense. From the heap went up flame, then a tremendous burst of smoke that hid the priestess and everything behind her. Dent sniffed; gunpowder, eh?

THE smoke continued to rise, pierced by flames. The drum-beats thudded steadily. The voice of Keave quavered on, more shrill and fierce. She was calling upon the gods to permit their children one more look at Keave the hero, at Kamehameha the conqueror.

"Let them return from the dead!" she cried out. "Let them return, that their children may know the time is come to arise and slay! Let them return, to give greeting to Queen Nahiena their child! Chiefs and people, is this your prayers also?"

A roar of assent swelled up—a roar of blended ferocity, wonder, recognition and credulity. The wild and savage eagerness in those voices thrilled Dent. These were not the laughing, gentle Kanakas he had known, but men stirred to the very depths and imbued with a furious ecstasy.

The two feather robes were consumed; the bones and skulls shone whitely in the flames; the smoke lessened and was gone. Keave stood with arms extended, facing the house of the gods. The drumming thud had ceased. There was a silence of suspense, of waiting.

Then something moved and took shape in the dark house-entrance.

A gasping breath stirred the intent hundreds. As the thing took form, as the hideous hair-rimmed mask of the king and god was discerned, those men were shaken by a word that swept through them like a storm-wind. . . . "Keave! Keave!" Recognition and awe and terror passed over the temple area.

Keave, mask and glorious red feather robe, crude weapons, massive physique, was plain to every eye, stepping out and standing motionless beside the entrance. Excited voices rose and fell and rose

again, to be stilled suddenly by sight of something gleaming against the dark opening. A yellow gleam like sunlight. A figure, superhuman in height, helmeted and cloaked in yellow; balancing a spear famous in song and story.

The silence became terrible as that figure advanced into plain sight. Men held their breaths. No word of recognition was needed here. That gigantic shape in the royal robes was known to them all. Here was the conqueror, "the ruler of the eight seas," he whom many of them had beheld in the flesh and had served. He, too, stood beside the house entrance.

If the effect in the shadowed cavern on Hawaii had been powerful, here in the bright sunlight it was terrific beyond words, aided by mass psychology. A low sound like a suppressed groan went fluttering through the crowded ranks, yet not a person moved. Dent could feel the almost inhuman tension mounting.

Upon this frightful silence, Keave burst with a shrill, fierce cry to the oracle, demanding that the god speak to them. Under his breath, Ezra Clum muttered something that was not angelic; then he responded in his deep, powerful voice:

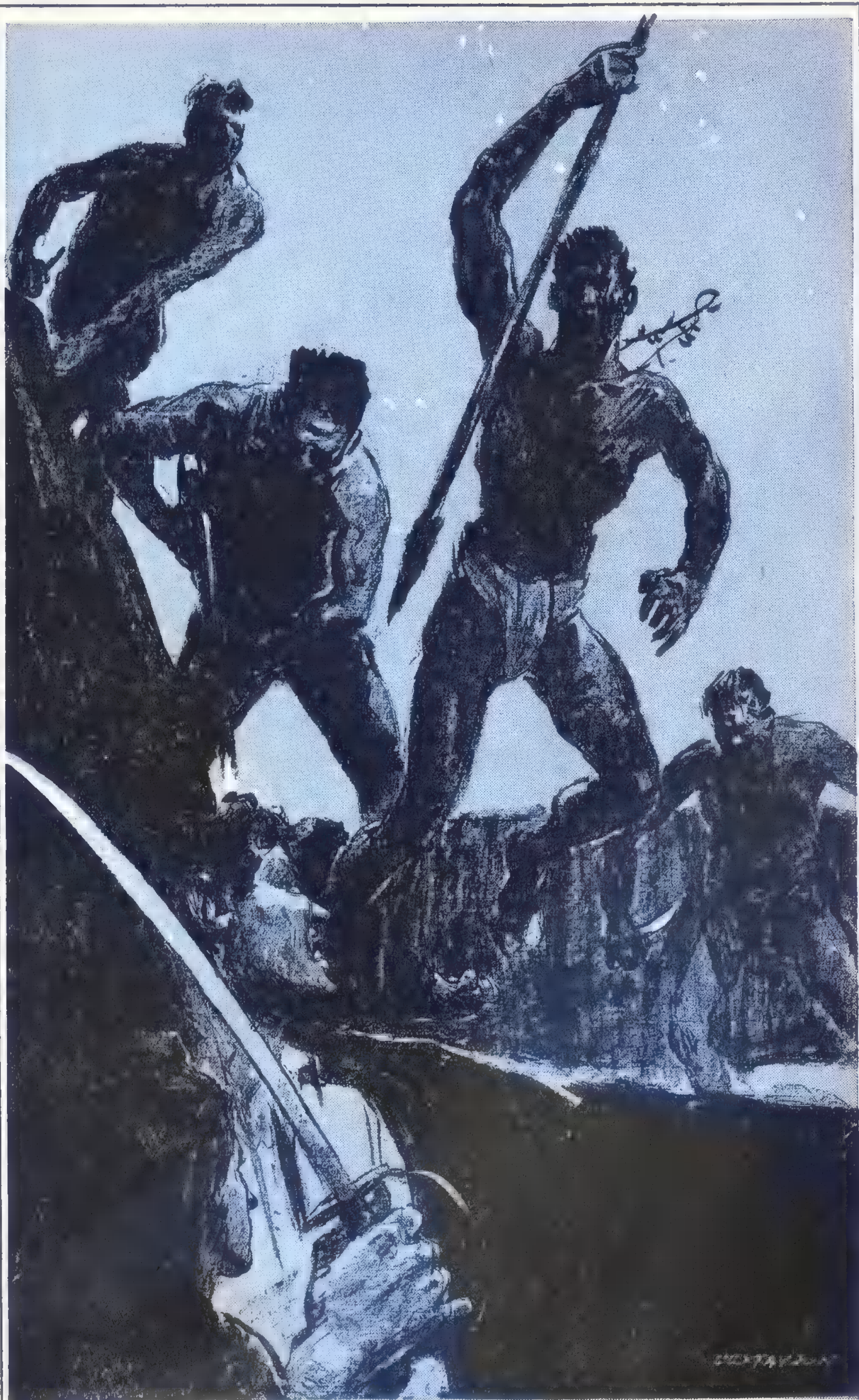
"You have seen, you have heard; the gods have returned. They have sent one of the royal blood to rule over you, to hold the spear of Kamehameha."

Silence again. Once more the boy began to thump his drum. The sound lent a pulse to the keen tension. The giant golden figure of Kamehameha moved, lifted the great spear, brandished it in air, and his voice rolled out above the assemblage in majestic power; even Dent, who knew the voice of Thady, was amazed by its reverberant thunder:

"Nahiena! Aloha nui, Nahiena!"

SHE came from the outer entrance, down the narrow alley into the outer court, on into the inner court, robed in glorious golden feathers, yellow flowers in her hair and wreathing her throat and arms. The utter reality of her presence, of her smiles, of her words, was overpowering. The agonized tension was burst asunder. Men leaped up yelling applause and welcome. Pent-up emotions were loosed in wild abandon. Louder and louder rose the frenzied uproar; men danced, yelled, shook weapons. Muskets banged out at the sky.

And in the midst of this, an accident, seemingly trivial and quite unforeseen, happened.



Dent whirled; three brown men were leaping at them in silent attack. They were almost upon him; his cutlass lashed home.

At a sign from Keave, the gigantic shape of Kamehameha withdrew again into the house of the gods. That of Keave turned to follow; but he, in turning, caught his toe in one of the withes that bound the poles together and lay looped along the ground. He was tripped and flung off balance.

He tried desperately to save himself. He staggered across the open space, arms outflung. He dropped his club. He almost recovered. The chiefs sitting closest shrank aside as he neared them. Then he lost balance completely and fell forward headlong. As he struck the ground and went rolling, the huge and hideous mask of Keave burst loose and fell away.

It was Gorman who sat up and blinked around, his white face grotesque against the panoply of red featherwork.

IN the outer court, the massed ranks were still seething with frenetic ecstasy; but here, about the *anu* of the oracle, a terrible silence struck down every voice, paralyzed every figure. The chiefs, in one flash of awful comprehension, realized the cheat, the imposture. They stood an instant in stunned silence.

Then, almost as one, a score of voices were loosed in a yell that froze Dent's blood with its pealing horror of ferocity.

Keave was frantically shrieking something; but savage hands caught her; she was pulled down, drawn in under brown figures, shriek upon shriek escaping her as they tore her to pieces. Gorman, rising to his feet, was struck by a spear that went through his body. Another and another followed; before he could fall, a dozen spears were riddling his form.

"For God's sake!" cried Dent upon the echo of that first yell. "Get Mary—quick! Into the house yonder. There must be a back entrance."

Nahiena, in fear and terror, was seeking the shelter of that house of the gods. Ezra Clum dashed open the wicker door at the rear of the *hau* and scrambled out. Dent followed, hurling himself at the girl, rushing her into the darkness of the thatched house. Half a dozen brown shapes darted upon them. Ezra Clum scooped up the fallen club of Keave and met them in mid-career.

"Get her out, Dent!" His voice rose, stentorian, for almost the last time. "By the house! Out the back way!"

A musket banged out, and he staggered as the ball went through him.

Within the twin inclosure, a frightful thing was happening. The shrieks of

Keave had ceased; but wherever a white face showed, there was a maelstrom of ferocity. Clum shouted aloud, and here and there seamen responded. A few firearms banged out; not many. Those of the Honolulu Company who went down, stayed down. Knives stabbed, spears plunged, clubs battered, voices yammered for vengeance upon sacrilegious and trickster whites.

Five men broke through the mass to Clum's side, using their fists; they had no weapons. He was a ghastly object, blood-spattered from the club, and blood gushing from the wound in his chest.

"Through the house!" he gasped.

Yell upon yell resounded. The surging mass of brown men bore forward in a wave. Ezra Clum faced this wave and shattered the front of it as his club swung. Then a spear went through him and the club rose no more.

The five seamen had darted into the house. Here and there weapons showed; they snatched at spears, clubs, rusty cutlasses, and went streaming through for the rear, where a patch of sunlight gave hope of egress.

An opening, yes! They were scrambling through, then took frantically to their heels. Ahead, where the lava slope mounted sharply, three figures appeared. The five men followed at top speed. Behind, natives were flooding over the low stone walls of the *leiau* and pouring after in hot pursuit, giving tongue like dogs nearing the kill. One man stumbled and went down. He fell behind, the glistening brown shapes caught up with him, and a fountain of blood spurted into the air as a spear slit his throat.

The other four fled on.

DENT, pounding along in the lead with Nahiena, was terrified by the girl's face. Her yellow cloak had torn away. She ran lightly, her slender brown shape cloaked only by the wide *maro* wound about her. But her face was a wide-eyed mask of wild horror, as though she were unconscious of what she did. She must have seen her father shot, thought Dent.

And here was Thady, grotesque and huge, slaving in his blind and fearful panic as he ran. By some miracle he had retained the cloak and helm and spear of Kamehameha, and swept along at enormous leaps.

A glance back, and Dent strained anew. A file of those brown figures was strung out in the lead, twisting after them, now

lost among the mazes of volcanic rock, now bounding into sight again. He himself was following Nahiena blindly. He saw that the lava ridge was close ahead, with its bare sun-swept expanse. Once across this, once on in the little cleft where the house and pool were— But what use? Thought of escape was futile.

HERE was the open ridge. Nahiena, with that look of horror, was flitting across the patch of sunlight. Dent, his lungs bursting, fire in his throat, plunged after her. As he ran, he got rid of his jacket. It fluttered behind him. His pistols—small good would two pistols do him! He tried to get the belt free, but could not.

A crash, a despairing burst of oaths. He looked back to see Thady sprawling, picking himself up, snatching up spear and helmet. Then, for the first time, Dent remembered the bound man, back there at the edge of the open space.

He faltered. He slowed, as the heart-leaping impulse to stop took hold of him. He looked for the bound figure and found it. Then, a groan on his lips, he spurred himself into speed again. Nahiena had already vanished ahead. The flood of brown men was now almost at the open space. . . .

For one moment they were checked, were halted, were held in sharp recoil by the towering golden warrior who faced them: Kamehameha himself, helmet on head, spear menacing! One of the chiefs yelled furiously and flung himself forward, cutlass swinging. Thady met the rush with a spear-thrust that transfixed the chief—but the spear went down with the dead man, and the other brown shapes closed in.

The towering figure fell. Its golden yellow was changed to red, bright red in the sunlight. There was for a little while some furious motion of moiling bodies and weapons; then this quieted. Now, however, the flood of islanders had found the bound man lying close by among the rocks. They dragged him into the sunlight and cut his bonds; they gathered about him with gleeful hideous clamor, with dripping weapons reaching at him; and there Sir Francis looked his last upon the blue sky and the glinting distant sea.

Of this, however, Dent saw nothing.

Nahiena was lost to sight ahead as he plunged among the broken masses of lava above the ridge. Luckily, there was no losing the way here; he had only to keep going, to reach the bend and the

abrupt opening into the little cleft. The bend came at last, and the glimpse of green. He caught sight of Nahiena's figure there, for an instant, ere it was gone. He looked back. A tiny group of men, three or four only, were visible on the trail; but others would be behind them.

Panting, gasping for breath, he found himself at last in the leaf-enclosed gorge, on the path that led to the house. It was still uphill work; he found it hard to realize that noon could scarcely be past as he labored along. He was no runner, yet he was gaining upon the girl ahead. He caught a glimpse of her again, as he neared the house.

She was heading on along the disused path, on past the house, apparently in some hysteric urge blind to everything around. She halted briefly, turned, looked back. He thought she waved her hand before she swung around again and was lost in the greenery. Behind him, a yell pealed up. The foremost pursuer, too, had caught sight of her. So they were after her as well! A chase in frenzied blood-lust, a massacre without pity. . . . Men gone mad with murder!

WITH breath coming in gasps, Dent labored on. He was done, he knew; his feet were like lead now, his lungs were afire. He was dimly aware that the main chase had been momentarily checked, no doubt by Thady. On and on. . . . Dent remembered his two pistols. Ah! She might still get clear of them all, if these first, fleetest runners could be stopped!

He looked over his shoulder. Not three, but four—the first man held a spear, the others had only knives, apparently. No, by heaven! The second man had a longer blade, a cutlass! The four were strung out, bounding along in single file, sleek naked brown shapes.

And here was the little pool under the overhang of rocks.

Dent halted, plunging to a dead stop, his knees shaking and barely holding him up. He turned, took out one pistol and stuck it under his belt, then took out the other and cocked it. No time to make sure now—if the caps were lost, he was lost as well. No time to do anything except stand there, gasp for breath, watch the foremost brown figure come leaping at him with spear upheld to stab—brown face, teeth bared by snarling lips, eyes rolling in frenzied lust for blood. . . .

The pistol belched. Ducking aside, Dent barely escaped collision as man and spear drove in headlong fall past

him, through the gush of smoke. He dropped the pistol, plucked out the other. The second Kanaka was yelling exultantly, cutlass a-swing, stout blade glinting in the sunlight.

Dent shot him through the body. He sprang high in air, blood leaping out over his brown and glistening skin; his yell went into a high quaver that ended in his fall. And here were the other two men, knives flashing, convulsive set faces wild through the drift of powder-smoke.

Dent smashed one across the eyes with the empty pistol, found himself locked with the second. The first whirled and leaped in for a hold. They were upon him together, knives stabbing, as his fist hammered at them.

And then, suddenly, one burst into a frightful scream that rose upon the sunlight with demoniac frenzy. He fell away. Dent lunged at the other. Underfoot, the first man lay clutching and tearing at his throat. The second threw out his arms frantically. Dent caught the knife and wrested it from his brown fingers, and got himself balanced. The Kanaka was hanging there, half off his feet, impaled under the shoulder-blade by that sharp hook of steel, as a fish is impaled and held by the spear. Dent stabbed him twice with the knife, then jerked the hook clear and stepped back. This man fell, dying, beside the other, who had ceased to claw at his throat.

Only the man with the cutlass still lived. He was on one elbow, blood pouring from him. Dent dropped the knife, whirled, and caught up the fallen cutlass. He met the eyes of the dying man and checked himself. No; not needed now. The brown head fell, the torso fell, the Kanaka gasped and lay quiet.

Dent turned. No others in sight, as yet. But he could hear voices. Yells were on the air, ringing up the tiny cleft.

"Abner! Abner!" The voice was nearby.

He swung around. She was there in the water, calling to him:

"Abner! Here! We can hide—"

He tossed the cutlass into the bushes and plunged to her side, clothes and all.

Chapter Seventeen

"THEY'VE gone," whispered Nahiena. The rout had passed, close and never suspecting. The rout of exultant, blood-seeking men, breathing vengeance on the slayer of the four beside the pool, howling for the life of the queen they had so

lately hailed with words of love. On and up, pouring over the lava hills.

"They'll come back," said Dent. Here in her arms, under the craggy overhang where a drooping tree-branch hid them from view, he was thankful that the steel hook was washed clean. He had caught the hook in a crevice, slightly above them; it held them both suspended and motionless. "Listen!" he muttered. "What are they saying?"

NAHIENA began to tremble again. True, men were coming back down the path from above, talking as they came.

"One of the chiefs sent them to carry the dead men down to the temple," she breathed at his ear. "The others aren't coming back. They're going to scatter and—and find us. They say the whole thing was a lie, that I'm Clum's daughter and not a native—"

"True enough," muttered Dent, glancing down at her white shape against him. The brown stain was all gone, now.

He would not have been so complacent, had he known what those brown men were saying, as they grouped about the four bodies and lifted them, one at a time. That white devil with the iron hook . . . throat torn out . . . four men killed by one man . . . the voices and pad-pad of feet died away at last, and Nahiena, who had caught those words, relaxed.

"My father, Abner! Are you sure?"

"Only too sure," he said grimly. "But he had the ending he wished. He did what he had desired!" He told her of the scene with Sir Francis. She shivered.

"So useless, all of it! And what can we do now?"

"Plenty," he said. "I'll slip ashore and go to the house. You wait here, hidden. I'll bring you something to wear, and get myself dry clothes. We can strike over the back way and try to reach the shore. Keave left a canoe there."

"What good is that?" she said drearily. "They'll be watching."

"So will the stars," said Dent. "We'll wait for evening."

He was talking for the benefit of her courage; he himself knew there was no hope at all. Those Kanakas would savagely wipe out every trace of the conspiracy. They would never forgive the cheat that Keave had worked upon them. The canoe? Even if he could reach it, even if it were still on the beach where Keave had left it, this was only a hollow

mockery of escape. The natives, too, had canoes—and this was only a little one, unable to cope with the open sea.

He made his dripping way to the house, alert at every instant for enemies, but there were none, for the moment. He found a few garments there that must have belonged to Ezra Clum, and an old pair of boots. He shifted into them. There was no weapon of any sort. He swallowed some rum, took what food was in sight and what garments he could find belonging to Nahiena, and hastened back to the pool.

Here he found the cutlass he had tossed into the bushes. This cheered him. He stayed on watch until Nahiena was dressed; then they burrowed in among the trees and greenery to wait. He urged some rum on her, made her eat something, then lay holding her in his arms until her tears ceased and she fell into exhausted slumber.

He was bruised, scratched, cut here and there by knives; but Marbleheaders were tough: he made light of his hurts.

TWICE during the afternoon hours, parties of natives came past, but Nahiena did not waken. Dent was stiff and sore when at last, with the sunlight fading, she opened her eyes and drew clear of him, blinking around. Memory of everything flooded back upon her; she shrank, then faced it bravely.

"Eat what's left of the grub," said Dent. "Then we'll get started."

"For—for where?"

"I don't know," he said grimly.

Getting started was a nervous business. The sun was gone when they left the cleft and started the climb among the fantastically shaped masses of fissured lava; they met no one, no natives were in sight anywhere ahead, yet one never knew what might pop up at any instant.

They clambered on. Time passed; daylight died; the pale star-points began to glitter in the greenish sky, and the green turned to blue and to black. Slowly, a frantic certainty gripped Dent with tightening fingers: He was lost!

Memory clutched at that rounded shelf or shoulder of lava, with the three rock pinnacles, from which he had seen the sea and the scrap of canvas on the previous afternoon. He sought in vain for any indication of it. The two of them toiled on among the maze of eroded lava fragments; the stars were cold, now. Those blazing pin-points gave sufficient

light to show the way, but it was always the wrong way.

"I'm turned around; I'm lost," confessed Dent at last. They had paused for a breathing-spell. He stared hopelessly at the expanse of lava, and told her of what he sought. "If we could find that bare shoulder, we'd be all right. It's directly at the head of the gorge that runs down to the shore. But I've missed it."

They sat in silence. There was no wind, no breeze; an appalling stillness lay upon the air and the jumbled waste of rock.

"There must be a dead calm," said Nahiena. Her voice was abstracted, dreamy, as she sat resting. She seemed to ignore his confession. "When it's calm like this here, then the sea is just glass around the island. If we were at the canoe now, we could push it out and paddle on and on and on—"

"Until the first wave swamped us." Dent laughed harshly.

A faint sound, so far away that it was not a sound at all, touched his senses. The double tap of a bell, it seemed, four times repeated. His imagination was evoking old memories. That would be eight bells, struck by a ship's bell; the very thought of a deck and of swelling canvas wakened intolerable longing. His mind was playing tricks on him! With a deep breath, he stood up.

"Come along. We'll make for that height on the left . . ."

They struggled on. Useless, useless! The appalling conviction beat in upon him with greater force. Even if they reached the shore, what use? They might hide out among the rocks for a day or two, but lack of food and water would drag them to ruin. Of the four mission stations on this island, none were near here.

Nahiena gasped, came close, caught at Dent's arm.

"Careful! I can hear—"

A VOICE broke in upon her, from somewhere close by in the obscurity—a Kanaka voice. At once she made response, trying to deepen her tones. Useless! An exultant yell burst forth. It was answered from another point to the right, from a second point. The voice leaped in a fiercely jubilant question; a stone clattered under bare feet.

Dent swung toward the sound. A brown shape, indistinct in the starlight, was almost upon them, giving another

view-halloo as it came. It was ten feet away, now, more clearly visioned—a stalwart native leaping in upon them with spear extended for stabbing. No time to evade, no time to think!

Nahiena stooped and came up, hurling a bit of rock. It struck the native in mid-leap, not hurting him but confusing his stab. The spear thrust in; Dent struck against the long haft as his arm swept around. The exultant yell of the



"A ship—a real ship! Floating there becalmed—waiting for us!"

Kanaka was cut short, literally. The cutlass did that, cleaving into flesh and grating on bone. Crippled, howling, the brown man leaped away and was gone, but he thrashed about somewhere in the obscurity, his voice wailing and whimpering on the night.

"Abner! Look out—behind us!"

Nahiena's voice was frantic. Dent whirled. A rush of shapes there—with three brown men leaping at them in silent attack. One held a musket, and fired as he ran; naturally, he missed. The explosion, the vivid flash, lit up everything. Dent saw the three clearly, and saw Nahiena stooping for the fallen spear. Then darkness came down.

That flash had been enough. They were almost upon him; his cutlass lashed out and slogged home. A man yelled. Another struck with a club through the powder-smoke; Dent, hit over the head, went staggering.

He heard a gasping cry from Nahiena, found a dark shape at his throat, heard a grunt as some weapon missed its aim. His iron hook tore savagely into the body that reeked of coconut oil, and the Kanaka screamed. Dent jerked himself clear and the cutlass slashed down for the junction of neck and body. The blow drove home. The man dropped and lay in a mass, head half severed by that blow.

The powder-smoke drifted acridly on the still air. Dent peered around. The

man at his feet was done for. Two voices broke from the obscurity, groaning, cursing; two hurt men out of the fight. Were there only four in all? Then where was the fourth?

"Abner! Where are you?"

Dent found her at one side, leaped for her, came to abrupt halt. She was holding the long shaft of the spear she had picked up; spraddled against a clump of rocks was the fourth Kanaka, pierced through and through by the spear. With a cry, Nahiena let go the shaft, which flew up into the air as the brown corpse sagged and fell upon its fallen musket.

"Oh! He's dead!" she cried in quite illogical horror. "He was the man who shot my father."

Impossible for her to know who had shot Ezra Clum, thought Dent, as he gathered her into his arms.

"Never mind. You're a Marbleheader, all right," he said, peering about. "No more of them, I guess. But we'll have to get away from here!" His voice failed. His heart-leap stopped it; sight of the clump of rocks above the dead Kanaka took his breath. Then he burst out:

"Nahiena! Look, look—the three little pinnacles! This is what we've been looking for; this is the place—come on, come on!"

Excitement spurred him. Useless or not, he forged ahead, Nahiena at his

heels. Yes, there was the open naked shoulder of lava!

He broke into a stumbling run, crossing it, searching the starlit depths beyond. The beginnings of the deep gorge opened plainly to his memory. Hand in hand, the two of them began to pick their way down among the rocks and loose rubble. He had even forgotten to look out at the distant starlit sea in his exultation, and already the sea was gone from sight as the sides of the gorge rose to right and left, closing out everything.

It had taken an hour and more to climb this steep with Keave. The descent took far less, though risky enough at best. They encountered no one, heard no alarm; evidently the voices of those up above had failed to reach other ears.

In bursting eagerness, useless though it must be, Dent saw the rocks opening out, saw the stretch of sandy beach ahead. Here, too, the air was oppressive with a dead stillness; even the unceasing surf seemed lulled to nothing. Panting, he dragged Nahiena into a run. He looked for what he sought, far above tide mark, and found it . . . a dark shape alongside a high jagged rock.

"The canoe! It's here!" He halted, and caught the girl to him joyously. "Look, by the rock; no one has touched it. If we—"

His words were quenched suddenly.

"Abner! What's that?" she exclaimed.

He had heard it, clearly, distinctly, silvery strong upon the great stillness. The double "clang-clang" of a ship's bell. A ship's bell! Then the thing he had heard, so far above, so faint, had not been imagination! Only an hour ago? Why, it seemed ages! And here was two bells struck. . . .

The ocean was like molten glass, slowly heaving to the sullen swell of the surf that lined the rocks with phosphorescent, ghostly radiance. He looked, and saw it, far out; a scrap of canvas, high canvas. He pointed to it, speechless, and Nahiena saw.

"It's a ship!" she cried out. "A ship! Is it your schooner from the cove?"

"No. Devil take that schooner! . . . Look, courses, topsails, royals . . . that must be canvas piled high!" Dent exclaimed. "A ship, a real ship! The one I saw yesterday, becalmed, floating there, waiting for us! —Quick! The canoe!"

The rest was starlight, and rapture, and things more precious than all the gold of Eldorado.

THE END.



Neutral

IF your name were Jim Minor and if you were a deputy U.S. marshal for fifteen years in a border district where you could call everyone by his first name, the chances are that some wag with a Texas drawl would have dubbed you Jemima. And if your name became a fixture and something of a legend, because you were the only incorruptible law these people knew, you probably wouldn't care. That is, you wouldn't if you liked the people and the country and believed in both. Jim Minor did, so he never minded being known as Jemima the length and breadth of his country, which was one of tawny red deserts, of bare mountains, of tiny adobe towns.

But when the pretty little waitress came up to his table that night and asked, "Was the meal all right, Jemima?"



A spirited little Western drama by the man who wrote "Rough Shod" and "The Ivory Butt-plate."

By LUKE SHORT



Spirits

he sighed, wishing he were not so well known, and replied: "Sure. Now, how many people have you told I'm here?"

"The cook."

"Go back and tell the cook we'll make it a secret between the three of us, will you?"

A look of concern came into the girl's face. "Are you going to arrest someone here, Jemima?"

"Yes." He reached for a toothpick. "Now run along like a good girl."

HE was the lone diner in the rather large dining-room of the Exchange House, San Jon's hotel. A small man at best, the empty room seemed to dwarf him and lay added years on his graying head. Stern ghosts of a thousand fights moved behind the humor in

his rain-gray eyes, clouding them sometimes, but frightening only the people who looked upon them in anger. An aching weariness was reflected in them tonight, despite the warm supper inside him. He had ridden hard that day, too hard, and was only recovering now from a genuine weakness of hunger and weariness, and he mouthed his toothpick morosely, reflecting on it. Somehow a small man had an added burden to bear. He must not only be as good a man as other small men, but he must be as good a man as a big man, and for a longer time.

Like bubble following bubble to the surface of water, another thought reached the top of his mind, darkening his eyes, touching his square, hard-bitten face with doubt. Ten years ago he could have made this ride, done his job, talked with the boys and then eaten only as an afterthought. Maybe the talk he knew was going the rounds, the looks he could interpret, the consideration the young

fellows were showing him—maybe these all pointed to something he had begun to suspect: He was not the man he used to be.

When the waitress came out of the kitchen, she walked over to the double doors from the lobby entrance, closed them and came over to him. He had packed his pipe now and was reaching for his half-dollar.

"It's all right," she said. "The cook will keep quiet. If you want, you can go out through the kitchen, Jemima."

"Thanks," Jemima said. "That was a good meal." He stared thoughtfully at her. "Seen Hoedown today?"

The girl's wide brown eyes veiled over a little, and she evaded his glance. "I—I don't know," she stammered.

"Speak up," Jemima said kindly. "I know he's here. He wrote the commissioner and told him if he had a good enough man to come and take him, then send him down." He paused. "You like him, maybe?"

"I hate him!"

"Afraid of him?" Jemima asked her shrewdly.

She nodded. "We all are. He has ways that you don't understand, Jemima. When you're gone, he'll come around here and find out I talked to you. I—I'll lose my job. He'll punish me some way."

Jemima flushed a little. "When I'm gone, he'll go with me," he said quietly. The girl nodded, but he saw she didn't believe him, and sudden anger was kindled within him. Here it was again. Ten years ago people were glad to give him information, serene in the knowledge that he could handle any trouble and protect them. But this girl doubted him. He said sharply: "Is he here now? Talk up, girl!"

Reluctantly, he thought, she told him. "He came in today. He's taken a house with that—that Mexican woman of his, and her little boy. He's going to live here, he says."

"Which house?"

"The Varden place, across the wash."

JEMIMA rose, placing his half-dollar by his plate, and walked over to the kitchen door. The girl followed him; and when she was in the kitchen, she said rapidly: "Please, please don't say I told you, Jemima!"

"I won't," Jemima said grimly. He stepped out into the alley, a small, broad-shouldered man built like a wedge, but a rather solid wedge, thickening toward

the middle. He wore two guns under his coat. His was a naturally arrogant walk, that of a small man; but a careful observer would have noticed that it was not as arrogant as usual. That pretty little kid in there—what she said did something to him. She didn't believe in him. She was friendly and respectful, but at bottom she was scared. And his words had not reassured her. It just confirmed what he had been noticing lately, and it explained several things: For instance, he saw now why all his recent jobs had been easy ones, arresting small Mexican farmers, reclaiming cattle, escorting prisoners. The younger men, the new deputies, were getting the tough assignments like this one. Why, if he hadn't convinced the commissioner, his boss, by an hour of stubborn talk that he was the only man for this job, he never would have been sent here. At that, he had seen the doubt in the commissioner's eye.

HE found his horse down the alley where he had left him, reins tied to a lock on a woodshed. The horse was weary, and Jemima felt a sudden tenderness for him which he accurately recognized as the old and weary sympathizing with the old and weary. Monte, like his master, wasn't the horse he used to be.

Jemima stroked his head in the darkness and considered. The Varden place was on the outskirts of San Jon, a low adobe house that old man Varden had thrown up forty years ago, the oldest place in town. It was Mexican, plain, many-roomed, open to the hills on the east. It could house all the men that traveled with Hoedown; its corrals could hold all the cattle he stole. It was close to the border, which Hoedown was fond of crossing in turbulent times, and it was also close to the San Jon saloons, another necessary qualification. Jemima knew it well from old man Varden's day.

If he was wise, there was only one course to follow. None knew of his presence here save the girl and the cook. Hoedown wouldn't be expecting him, since he had set out from the office an hour after the letter reached there and had ridden two long days. Surprise was the weapon. As he had done a hundred times before, he should ride quietly through the darkened main street and stop at a tie-rail. Of the horses standing there, he should pick one that looked strong and fresh, and ride out to Varden's



"Speak up," he said kindly. "I know he's here."

place. A little patient watching, and he was sure to get Hoedown alone. Capture him, disarm him and bring him in, resorting to guns only if necessary. Yes, that was the old pattern, but tonight it was impossible. He couldn't explain why it was, but it just was. That was the easy way, the safe way; but he was feeling neither easy nor safe tonight.

He mounted his weary horse, knowing that by doing so he cut off all chance of escape if things turned against him. Strangely, he thought of something old Senator Cardwell had once said of him. That was at a dinner tendered him when he recovered the loot of a big Wells-Fargo hold-up. Senator Cardwell had said: "Friend Jim is like this forty-rod whisky we drink around here: Seventy-five per cent neutral spirits, as the distillery men say. It's neutral only so long as you don't get it down; but when you do, duck."

He smiled at that, a little wistfully too, as an old man delights in the memory of youthful manliness. He was approaching the four corners of San Jon. To get a new horse, he would have to turn left to the Border Girl, where ponies were ranked against the tie-rail in the dim light thrown across the saloon doors. If he turned right, headed for the wash, he burned his bridges behind him.

He turned right then, toward the Varden place, knowing that when a man got

too old to do his work, it was time to be merciless. If the commissioner wouldn't be merciless, he himself would.

The wash ran in a big elbow behind the town, cutting southeast toward the base of the hills. A strip of sandy, sage-stippled slope tilted down from the last house to the wash; and across that there was old man Varden's orchard running for a quarter of mile parallel to the road and ending against the house.

DISMOUNTING in the wash, Jemima left Monte there, then squirmed through the *latta* fence and was in the orchard. It was grown high with weeds, and broken limbs tripped him; but he had time, lots of it. His course was patient, slow, and soon he saw the lights of the house ahead. Someone was playing a guitar in there, singing in a merry, low voice. Coming closer, Jemima dropped to all fours and crawled through the weeds to the fence. The orchard ended abruptly. Four feet beyond the fence was a broken grindstone, and beyond that was the hard-packed yard. Fifty feet away, the house reared its black shadow against the night, and in the wall facing him was the window, lighted.

Jemima waited a long time until he made out the figure of a man squatting on the steps. The guitar kept up a series of lively hoedown tunes, the same ones that had given Hoedown his name. Off



to the east, at the hollowed-log trough under the cottonwood, five horses were tied to a rail, jingling their bridle-chains in the warm night.

Jemima called up patience. Sooner or later the guard would have to move for something. The man's cigarette glowed and faded and presently arced onto the dirt. A minute later he rose and turned the corner of the house. Jemima wasn't sure until he heard the well-pulley working, and then he crawled through the fence and flattened himself against the house wall. His gun was drawn now.

When the guard ambled around the corner, a carbine slackly in his hand, Jemima lashed out with the butt of his gun, bringing it down smartly upon the man's head. He fell softly to the ground, and the guitar music inside was not interrupted. A girl was singing now, and men's voices blurred her song with laughter.

Jemima walked up to the door and paused on the stone step. He took a deep breath, put a hand stealthily on the knob, and with a gun in his other hand, swung the door open and stepped inside.

The music stopped as if cut with a knife, and the first thing Jemima said was: "Step away from that lamp, you!"

A man fell back from the table, and Jemima surveyed his loot. Hoedown lay stretched out on a rickety sofa, the guitar-player seated at his feet, a woman on the sofa-arm beyond his head. Two punchers were squatted against the far wall, side by side, and then there was the fifth man, who had been sitting on the table by the lamp. Under the table, a four-year-old Mexican boy was annoying a bored puppy with a string lariat.

Jemima took all this in one swift look as the men against the wall lunged to their feet. The girl, a pretty Mexican youngster, rose too and backed against the wall.

HOEDOWN came to a sitting position. He had a long, pleasure-loving and whisky-flushed face, a shock of red hair. The grin that was on his lips washed out, and a wary anger flooded his eyes.

"I got your letter, Hoedown," Jemima murmured. "Nice of you to write." He stood there away from the door, five feet five inches of wire-taut, cool nerve to these men, but inside him was a crawling uneasiness. He wasn't afraid; he just didn't like that kid to be in here—and the woman. His gray, cold eyes did not betray him. They ignored Hoedown, for he was without a gun, and settled on the other four. A wild and wicked anger shaped their faces, and Jemima knew what was coming. In about a half-minute that vicious daring which was the mark of these men would assert itself, and they would make a play. If they couldn't find the break to go for their guns, they would make it.

Jemima said: "Stand up, Hoedown. You, girl, go get—" He stopped. He was about to tell her to get their guns, but that would put her between him and them. They would make their play then, knowing he would not shoot at a woman. He finished sharply: "Stay where you are! Get up, Hoedown."

Hoedown was a bright man. He had to be, to rule this riffraff, and the reason for Jemima's hesitation did not escape him. He smiled faintly and said to the girl: "Stay put, Luisa."

Then to Jemima he said: "I reckon I like it here, Jemima."

"Get up!" Jemima said again.

"That makes three times you've said that," Hoedown drawled. "I can remember when you would have said it once, Jemima."

For answer, Jemima palmed up his other gun. With the left gun trained on the four men, he raised the right one to eye-level.

"Get up," he said again.

"I don't think so," Hoedown said easily.

Jemima wavered. If he cut down on Hoedown, all four of these men would make a try. There was that kid under the table, between them. There was the girl against the wall, pale and terrified. He couldn't do it, and it was pretty obvious that Hoedown knew it.

Hoedown said softly to his men: "Make a try, boys. What are you waitin' for?"

Jemima shifted his gaze back to them. "Yes, make a try, boys. Go ahead," he said. Little drops of sweat were beading his brow under his hat, forming to trickle down between his eyes.

The man on the left took a step to the side, his eyes intent and calculating.

"Maybe I will," he murmured.

Hoedown said: "Watch it careful, Jemima. This is the way men with guts do it."

There was a long, thin silence that was gathering to explode. The kid under the table made an indeterminate sound and started to whimper and then stopped. In those long seconds Jemima knew that he was beaten. The man on the left had his hand on his gun-butt.

Hoedown said suddenly, in a confident voice: "Hold it, Ray!" But he was looking at Jemima. He said to him: "Go home, Jemima. You're an old man."

Jemima made one last try, and it was a mistake. His tone was cold, impersonal: "Hoedown, even an old man can shoot fifteen feet. Get off that sofa and walk over here."

Hoedown said gently: "Go home, old man. You could have done it once. You can't now."

THE old man's gun tilted down. Ray made a quick movement, and Hoedown said sharply: "No!" He rose now and walked over to the table, his movements unafraid. His wide, loose-lipped mouth was shaped in a crooked grin, as, putting both fisted hands on the table, he leaned toward Jemima.

"I always thought you were a joker, Jemima. You made your bluff stick for twenty years. But you're not a git-down fightin' man, Jemima. You never were. You're too old to bluff." He jerked his head. "Get out."

"Not without you," Jemima said.

"Get out, I said—before I open the ball." Hoedown sneered. "Hell, I'm givin' you a chance, old man. I don't want to kill you. Go back and tell the commissioner he's got to do better than this—a lot better."

Jemima looked over the faces of those five men. There was no awe, no fear, no caution in them. That fine edge which a man has got to carry into a fight, the iron will to conquer, was gone from him. He felt cornered and beaten, and for the first time unsure of himself.

"Later," he said, taking a step backward to the door.

"I'll give you an hour to clear out of town," Hoedown said. "After that, I'll forget you're an old man."

Jemima, gun still trained on the grinning hard-cases, slipped out through the door and ran for the orchard. When he reached it, he paused, listening for a disturbance. But they were not even following him. A jumble of laughter reached his ears. He retreated back into the orchard and squatted down against the trunk of a gnarled apple-tree. His hands were shaking so that he flattened them on his thighs to steady them. He was done, finished. Nobody had to tell him that; he knew it too well. When a man pulls a bluff like that and is made to take water, he's through. The word of it can't travel fast enough. Not even the bleariest-eyed saddle bum or saloon riffraff would have any respect for that sort of man. And to think that a deputy United States marshal could hold his job after that was plain insanity.

But, dammit, he wasn't afraid! It was that woman and kid in there, and what would happen to them when all hell cut loose that stopped him, held him more effectually than fear. Hoedown thought it was fear. So did those other hard-cases. So would this whole county, who had been watching him, wondering when tough old Jemima would crack, believing he had cracked already and only lacked a situation to prove it. Well, here was their situation, cut to order and proving it to the hilt.

Oh, they would be polite enough about it. They couldn't laugh at his record. But he would be just another old gaffer in whom the flame of daring, of manhood, had died. And they would pity him. That was the worst. . . .

New sounds drifted across the orchard, and Jemima raised his head to listen. They were going outside. Soon, then, he heard the horses moving out of the yard and down the road toward town. There was a lot of laughter that rose above the sound of the horses, and then they were past, the boisterous reproof in their voices still hanging in the air.

JEMIMA lit a smoke now, wondering where they were going. To the saloon, he supposed, to spread the story around town.

In a little while they would gang up in a drunken man-hunt, with a deputy United States marshal as the quarry.

That story would never die, not as long as there were men who hated the law.

Jemima got up and carefully knocked out his pipe and pocketed it. His pace was thoughtful as he walked the length of the orchard and out of it to find Monte.

Mounting, he sought the road and headed straight for town. At the four corners he continued north until he came to Border Girl. Its lamps were about the only ones lighted here, and they cast an orange glow out into the soft gray dust of the street. Jemima nosed in at the hitch-rack and dismounted. After tying Monte, he walked the line of rail-haltered ponies, trying to make out their brands. Trouble was, he suddenly realized, he didn't know the brand he should be looking for. There was another way.

He strolled up to the saloon door and leaned against the side of the building, just to one side of the light. There was a gust of laughter exploding in the saloon, and then it quieted suddenly for a voice.

"Remember what old Cardwell said about him?" It was Hoedown's loud and boastful voice. "Seventy-five per cent neutral spirits!" More laughter. "*Neutral* aint the word for it. It ought to be *dead*."

Jemima was a little angry at that, but not much. He took off his coat and dropped it on the boardwalk, and then lifted his guns loose in their soft holsters. Riding sometimes packed them down until they didn't unlimber easily.

That done, he looked up at the night, smelling it, tasting it, liking it. Afterward, he shouldered through the bat-wing doors and came to a stop just a few feet inside them. A dozen men were grouped about Hoedown at the bar, listening to him.

IT was funny, the way they saw him. First man was the bartender, and he laid a hand on Hoedown's arm and said something, and then one man turned quickly. Others turned then, just as the first man moved to step aside. Slowly milling, they cleared a path between him and Hoedown.

In that utter silence, Jemima said gently: "Ready to come, Hoedown?"

Hoedown laughed. "Why, you old fool," he drawled, "I think I'll dance you out of town!" No anger, no protest, just contemptuous fun.

Jemima let Hoedown draw his gun and cock it loudly and then shoot at his feet. It was a poor shot, because it pounded

through Jemima's boot and burned his ankle.

It didn't hurt, and Jemima laughed throatily. His small hands moved then, streaking his guns up, out. Hoedown's amazement spoiled the quick shot which he got in before Jemima's two guns thundered in chorus. Hoedown was driven back against the bar, his foot upsetting a spittoon before Jemima's third and fourth shots winked out the overhead lamps.

THERE was silence, then, after Hoedown coughed; and his falling gun rang sharp on the bar rail. A tentative shot hammered out from the side of the room, and Jemima let that pass, waiting for silence again.

When it came, he said loudly: "Any man that opens fire on me, I will hunt down and kill." This same marksman took another shot.

Jemima walked softly in the direction of the violet flare. A boot scraped on the floor, and he paused, turning, watching the door. Suddenly a shape blocked out part of the door-frame and Jemima shot quickly, twice, and slid to the floor, just as shots from two sides of the room converged above him. The man in the door was down, his booted feet kicking a fading tattoo on the door-frame. Jemima said again: "Anyone else?"

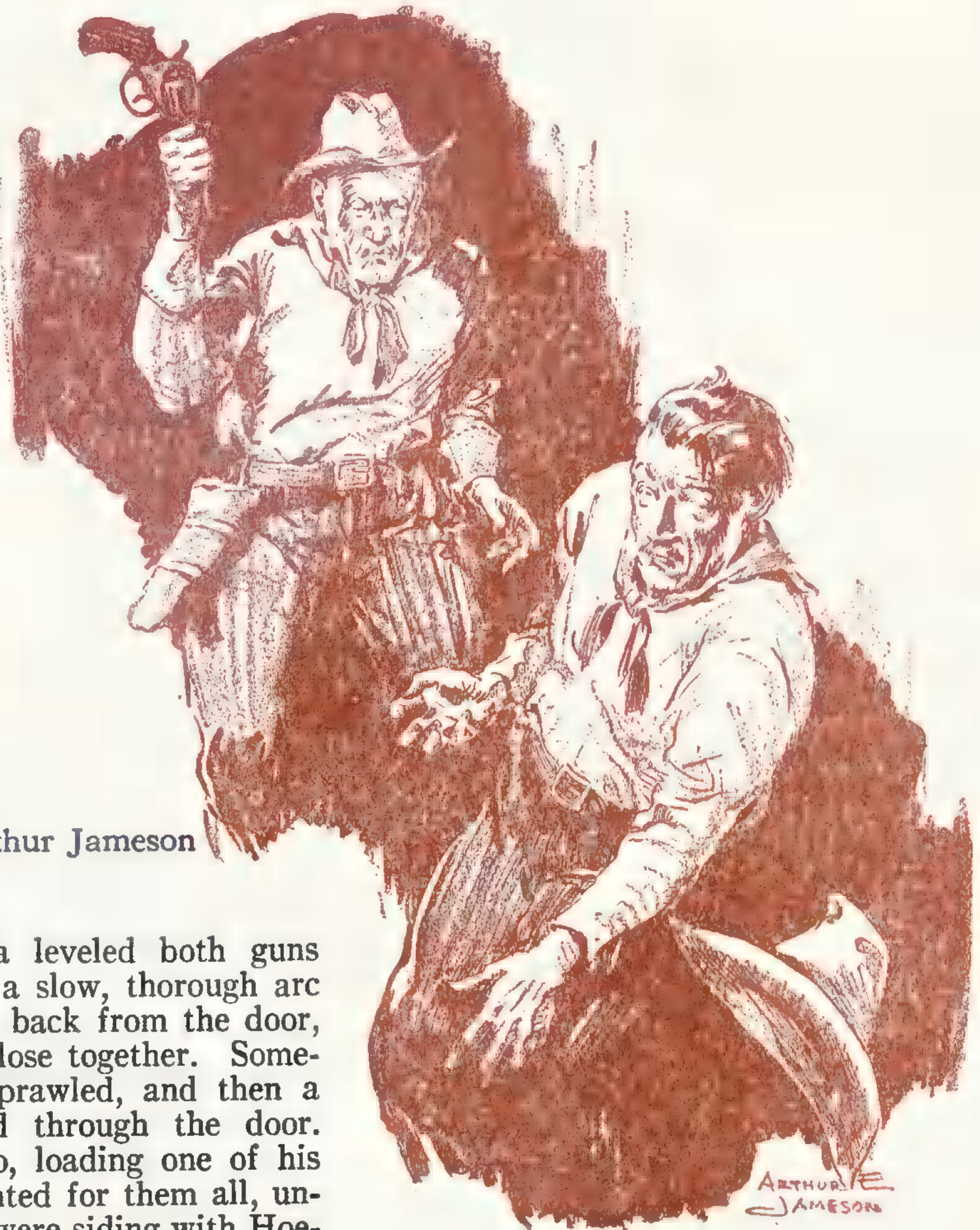
There was fear in this room now; you could feel it crawling in the darkness, making men strike out furiously, blindly, when their feet touched a table leg. Jemima knew it too; and he grinned, walking lightly on his toes toward the gambling-tables. He found a chair there in the breathing darkness, and holstered one gun. Backing up, he swung the chair high over his head toward the bar. It landed with a terrific crash: the bar collapsed in a jangle of glass. The man on that side of the room shot blindly at it, and Jemima cut down on him, emptying one gun. Another man opened up on him, but Jemima wasn't hit. He backed off against the far wall, reloading his guns, one at a time. He did it noisily, inviting more shots.

"Who's next?" he drawled in the silence.

Down the side a man cursed wildly, fear riding his voice; then it stopped, quiet flooding the room like water rushing in behind a pebble dropped in a pool.

Jemima said again, "Light up, bar-keep," and moved toward the door. There was a sudden pounding of feet for

When the guard ambled around the corner, Jemima lashed out with the butt of his gun.



Illustrated by Arthur Jameson

the door. Jemima leveled both guns waist-high, and in a slow, thorough arc he moved his guns back from the door, spacing his shots close together. Someone tripped and sprawled, and then a last figure crashed through the door. Jemima let him go, loading one of his guns. That accounted for them all, unless the townsmen were siding with Hoedown.

"Light up!" he ordered sharply. "You there at the bar, strike a match!"

After a half-minute the barkeep lighted a match. Most of the men in that room were lying on the floor against the wall, Jemima saw. The barkeep's match went out, but there was confidence in his step as he stumbled out into the room and yanked at the overhead kerosene-lamp with his pole.

FOUR men did not get off the floor when the lights were lit. There was Hoedown, lying across the spittoon. A man's feet were just visible under the swing-doors, and the third man was stretched out, his head to the door. The fourth was draped over the bar, bleeding onto the bar rail, and Jemima shuttled his glance from him to the watchers. His eyes were steady, level, cold.

He said: "Still think it's funny, boys?"

He was a small figure there against the blank wall, but there was something tough and implacable about him, in the way his huge guns fitted his small hands, in his face, still set with a cold anger.

One man broke for the door and was sick outside and three others went quickly to the bar for whisky. Four men walked toward Jemima, who was plugging the empties from his other gun.

"You want to ride after that other one, Jemima?" one of them asked.

Jemima's face broke into a thin smile. "No," he drawled. "Don't think we can make it to the border ahead of him." He nodded to the four downed men. "Better tell whoever it is takes care of this to clean up here." He hitched up his trousers a little and said, with a private smile of amusement: "Me, I think I'll hit my blankets. I'm gettin' old, boys."

He walked out the door, stepping carefully over the man lying there, and the doors swung back and forth after him, until their momentum died. The four men were watching those doors, as if waiting for that signal to speak.

One man sighed and said, "Gettin' old, huh?" He looked at the others, and commented in an awed, subdued voice: "Like *hell* he is!"

The *SWAN* of

*"This blessed plot
this realm, this England"
has been devastated be-
fore—as witness this grim
and brilliant story: the
tenth in "The World Was
Their Stage."*



HENRY VAUGHN was riding toward Brecon town from his gabled manor-house of Newton (known to the Welsh folk hereabout as Trenwydd) and his road wound along the river Usk.

His sorry wheezing nag, so poor a beast as to be not worth the stealing, was all he had left. He himself was decked out in his bravest—frayed, patched, faded garments, but the best he had to his name. Under his hat with its frayed plume, his

face was like a cold, heavily chiseled cameo, the numbed and lifeless face of a man who has seen too much. He was riding, as he thought, to speak the words that would bring home a bride to Newton's poverty; he did not dream that fate lay in waiting for him ere he came into Brecon, and that destiny bestrode with him the sorry nag.

His gaze dwelt upon the brawling Usk, the river he so loved; his gray eyes warmed, and his aquiline features, now

USK

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Pen drawings by John Richard Flanagan

sharpened by past wounds and fever, softened and became touched with a wistful tenderness.

"I did not know there was such beauty left to see," he murmured.

This was Wales; but in these latter days Wales shared England's bitter lot. And the whole of England was one hideous reek of death and ruin; the ideals and

faith and culture accumulated through past ages were swept away upon the tide of war; and men said that civilization itself was set back a thousand years, if not destroyed utterly.

Vaughn's first presage of strange things to come—though he did not recognize it as such—arrived when he saw Granny Blodwen waving her stick at him from the roadside. He slowed the all too willing nag. The old beldame, reputed to be a witch, reached up to him a little bundle of herbs and simples she had gathered for him, and spoke in Welsh.

"Here are celandine and clary and others, all gathered when the sun was out, young master," she gabbled. "It is strange that you, who have killed so many men and have more to kill, should now be a physician and a healer of men."



"You will not talk of love with the lady who is in your mind, but with another."

Vaughn regarded her with somber gaze. "I'm a soldier no more, Granny, and I have no more men to kill, either," he said rather sharply.

She blinked up at him and shook her head. "All the same, master, there is blood upon your hand."

"Stop your ill-omened prating, Granny Blodwen!" he exclaimed angrily. "I am riding to talk of love with a lady, and would sooner have blessings than curses."

"You have known Blodwen all your life, master, and never had curses from her," retorted the crone. "I tell you that a king has been seeking for you; and that you will not talk of love with the lady



"She is not dead; she has need of you."

who is in your mind, but with another. And that is a blessing too."

"It is bosh," said Vaughn. "The only king in England is a fugitive, somewhere in the north; and though I fought for him, he never heard of me."

HE touched spurs to the nag and rode on; but an uneasy fear lingered with him. Old Granny Blodwen had second sight, men said. Still, Vaughn knew she wished him no ill, and she had called her alleged information a blessing. Strange!

And her gift of herbs pleased him. He could trust her not to gather them by night, when plucked herbs do not keep as well. She often brought him such things, always with some sly jest about his having turned from killing to curing. It was the truth; soldier though he was, Vaughn had a gift and a knowledge both of healing and of surgery which had grown upon him through the wars, and now had become his vocation.

The town was ahead; he came to the seven-arched stone bridge, and slowly walked his nag across. With the alert eye of an old campaigner, Vaughn noted a crippled wreck of a man at the town end of the bridge, but paid him no heed. Such war-wreckage was all too common now.

He looked at Brecon, ahead. The old town, on its rise surrounded by the bowl of the Welsh mountains, was dirty and shabby with the neglect of years. The castle, and the priory buildings up above, were half crumbled. Everywhere some gaunt ruin sat, like a hag of evil personified. Vaughn knew the town might be dangerous for him, because Parliament men were here, and he was known to have ridden for the lost cause of the King; however, they had sore need of physicians and would probably leave him alone. . . .

"Lieutenant Vaughn! Harry Vaughn! D'ye remember Beeston Castle, and how ye cut off the arm of King Harry of Monmouth?" said a voice beside him.

VAUGHN halted the nag, looked down at the crippled man, whose face was swathed in rags, and astonishment flooded into his brain. The long agony of Beeston's siege, which had so nearly left him perished or a crippled wreck for life, welled up anew—wounds, fighting, incredible starvation, the shrieks and groaning of hurt men, and he himself moving like a healing shadow among the sick and dying.

"I remember Beeston as one remembers an unending hell," he said slowly. "All this past winter I have been very ill and close to death because of it."

"But mind ye the actor who called himself King Harry of Monmouth?" said the wreck bitterly. "His arm was hurt and swollen, and ye carved it off for him, and the stump healed. I was the one held the hot pitch to clap on the stump."

"Memory is a painful thing." Vaughn heard his own words as from far away, faintly. "Your voice is vaguely familiar, friend, but I do not remember your face."

"It was familiar to many on the London stage," came the retort. "Smallpox altered it, and changed the face that you knew in Beeston Castle. I was the knight Fluellen, Master Vaughn. Have ye forgot how we used to recite the play about King Harry and French Kate? And how you told us of Sir Roger Vaughn, your own ancestor, who was knighted on the field of Agincourt? And the lass Dionys, who held her father's arm when ye cut it off? Brave Dionys, ye called her—"

The lass Dionys! Henry Vaughn closed his eyes; his pale cheeks became white as death. His hands clenched on his saddle-bow. He had tried to forget all those terrors, and with them the vision of fled, lost beauty. It was only last autumn that Beeston had fallen, but he felt that the year 1645 would remain throughout his life as a turning-point and a memory of unmitigated horror. Not even this warm summer sun of 1646 could remove the chill of Beeston from his soul; not even the sweet, gentle face of the refugee girl up yonder at the old Priory, where she was sheltered by Lady Price, could drive from his memory the tawny regal eyes of the lass Dionys. Vaughn opened his eyes again and shook his head.

"Leave be, leave be," he said, stifling a groan. "She is dead, with all the world. I've turned from soldiering to doctoring. I can do naught for you, Fluellen; we're lucky at Newton if we have food for our own bellies."

They were always after him, old soldiers, maimed veterans of his own cavalry troop; he could do nothing for them, and the blunt words hurt.

He picked up his reins and lifted his face, looking at the ruinous Priory far above near the castle. Catherine waited there, a pleasant girl, a sweet refugee. She too had lost everything, and her brother had fallen beside him at Rowton Heath. She loved him a little, and he loved her placidly; he had come up from Newton today to talk about a wedding.

"But she is not dead," a voice was saying. "She is not dead; she has need of you. I was tramping to Newton to find you. We heard you were now a leech—"

Vaughn drew rein. He looked down, his gray eyes staring and dilated.

"Are you mad?" he asked hoarsely. "She died after the siege. A man told me."

The wreck jerked his thumb toward the hills.

"She's there, with Harry o' Monmouth and a few more," he said.

Vaughn caught his breath. "There's an ale-house beyond the bridge end. Meet me inside. Too dangerous to stand here talking. Damned Puritans everywhere."

He urged his sorry old nag onward. The words rang and rang through his brain: *She is not dead! She is not dead—and she has need of you . . .*

In a corner of the ale-house, feet scraping the rush-strewn floor, they sat over bread and cheese and ale. Henry Vaughn

said little or nothing. Fluellen, as he called himself, talked as he quenched famished cravings. And under the talk, Vaughn's brain reëchoed those ringing words: *She is alive, alive!*

Strange that she should be alive, that these others should be alive! Her father, who termed himself "King Harry," with such bitter irony, or this Fluellen, or any of them! Once, before the world turned upside down, they had been players in London, warm and fed and laughing, honored by king and nobles, courted by the gentry, no strangers to damask and jewels and broad gold-pieces, dancing to lilting lute and viol.

And now all was gone down to ruin with England herself—the King a tattered foresworn wanderer, nobles and gentry dead, scattered, forgotten, their homes burned or plundered, their estates sold, their sorry fragments ground down and robbed to the last loaf. Not they alone, but ordinary farming folk ruined and wasted, townfolk looted, churches devastated, colleges laid waste, all learning and culture destroyed. The whole face of England swarmed with veterans of disbanded armies, who murdered for a crust. Even in the walled towns no man's life was safe. . . .

The lass Dionys! Vaughn choked on his ale. Half a dozen of them yonder in the hills, a few miles away; a backwash of wreckage, of players who had clustered together. They had found an iron-workings and had taken shelter there, out of the world, far from anywhere; her father, King Harry of Monmouth, was Welsh-born, and the scattered Welsh folk let them stay and aided them, said Fluellen. But now the lass Dionys was ill and had sore need of help.

"DO you know Scethrog?" Vaughn asked suddenly. "Down the valley, near my stead of Newton. Close by is the Cwm Pooka, the fairy valley. Thence came Puck, for Shakespeare heard of him from my people, as he did about the other Welsh matters. . . . Well, well, meet me there tomorrow, early in the afternoon. I'll go with you."

"She needs help now," said the ragged Fluellen.

"She shall have it." Vaughn got out his pouch. He carefully shared the vial of white powder. It was frightfully hard to come by at any time, this stuff called Jesuits' bark, but he had bought some from the loot of Bristol; it was the only thing that would cure his own fever. The

wise Harvey had taught him the use of it in London.

"Give this to her," he said, with proper directions. "By tomorrow she should be in good shape, and I'll bring what else I have that may help her."

"God bless you, master!" said Fluellen.

Vaughn smiled. A rare thing, to smile. "Blessings on my gray hairs? Avaunt thee, villain! We'll meet tomorrow."

True, his brown hair was streaked with gray over the temples. These past years he had starved and bled, had ridden by stricken field and flood all over the west country. He had sat beside his old teacher, Harvey the king's physician, who had discovered how man's blood-stream circulates, the two of them wrapped in a ragged cloak under a hedge. He had himself learned surgery, with sword or dagger for tools, where men lay screaming after battle. His face was marked by privations, lined by old sufferings, his hair turning gray, though he was barely twenty-four

Leaving the tavern, he rode on up to the Priory, where Lady Price and a few women lived amid the wreckage of former wealth and greatness. He talked with Catherine; he talked with the others; but his mind was far away. Complaining that the fever was upon him, he mounted and went riding home again sooner than he had intended. And as Blodwen had prophesied, without talk of love.

Five miles home—down the winding, brawling Usk to the little gabled manor-house of Newton, now stripped to the bone of all comfort, kine and prosperity.

If ever the wars ended, he had been thinking that here he could make repairs to life. Here, with the placid Catherine, he might settle down as a physician, build up the little estate once more, and perhaps watch England come back from ruin—though this did seem an impossibility. And yet, time after time, England had been swept by savage slaughter and by brutal destruction of civilized ideals, only to recuperate and bloom once more; as though in the race and in the very land were some immortal spirit beyond any power to crush completely.

THAT night, Henry Vaughn sat by a flickering candle in an upper room opening on the summer stars—quill and ink-pot at hand. Now and again he had written scraps of poetry; tonight he tried to calm himself with this pursuit, but a fiercer ecstasy was upon him. The lass

Dionys—alive! He no longer felt himself an old, outworn man whose youth was dead. Settle down here, a country physician lost in the depths of Brecknockshire? Devil take such a future! Tonight there were new things quivering in the air.

AN odd mixture of old and young, this man sitting wide-eyed by the window, a queer mingling in him of death and life. What he had tried to write down, he could not. Now came to him words he had not sought.

He tried to put them away. This little band of wretched players, he told himself, were not his kind; they were miserable folk, rendered abnormal by horrors and sufferings. He would find the lass Dionys with her beauty gone, her appeal lost. She must be eighteen now. . . . And Catherine was eighteen.

"I'm queer too," he said, biting his lip. "The whole world's queer these days. . . . We see strange things; we hear strange voices. Like Jeanne d'Arc. No, by God! Like the man I pistoled at Rowton Heath, who sobbed out that he saw all eternity, and then died prating of old Queen Bess. . . . Like *John Falstaff*, who died babbling of green fields—"

He caught up the quill and wrote, wrote late into the night; and he did not write the pretty little jingling verses that so pleased the placid child Catherine

Morning came, and noon; and with it two countryfolk needing his help. He talked with them in Welsh, gave them remedies of some simple country herbs, sent them away. Later he mounted the old nag and went to his rendezvous, a bundle before his saddle; it held a few odds and ends that might give Dionys comfort, and an old sweet dress of yellow damask from a box in the loft that had escaped looting. His mother's, perhaps; he did not know or care.

That ragged wreck Fluellen met him in Puck's Valley, and they went on together. The white powder had made a new lass of Dionys, said Fluellen; she had gone all pink and white this morning, at talk of Master Vaughn. There was a Welsh woman lying dead up the hill path, and two dead children with her, he added; some talk had arisen of disbanded soldiers being about. God help the ravening rascals if any of the hill-folk caught them!

Vaughn loosened his sword in the scabbard, and thought of dead women and children he had seen in the ditch outside



"The whole world's queer, these days," he said. . . . He caught up his quill and wrote.

Bristol, and the Irish troops lying in heaps where they were massacred. These things gave him a wild, aching hurt to think about, and he could never get rid of them. Then the thought of Dionys crowded all else out of his mind, and eagerness swelled his heart.

The two of them went on, not rapidly, striking into the mountains by an old disused path, and from this by a faint track along a wild hillside to where a great hole gaped, an abandoned working for iron-ore such as the country-folk over Monmouth way termed a *scowle*. And at the door of this cavern opening sat Harry of Monmouth with his one arm; beside him was the lass Dionys, in rags and tatters, but radiant as the dawn.

Vaughn scarcely remembered the greetings, except that Dionys kissed him, and fire ran from his lips through all his veins. King Hal roared for sack and for malmsey, and compromised on water from the spring near by. He was a sad broken man, tall and dark, with deep eyes that had seen all the pits of hell.

"The others? Gone," he replied to Vaughn's question. "Gone to search the

hills for bark and herbs and anything that will cook into soup. Fluellen and I must be off too; I've marked a rabbit's warren over the hill, and we'll be back with meat of some sort ere dark. Sit you, rest you, make the lass smile if you can. . . . Eh, tobacco? Lord love you, man!"

VAUGHN had brought tobacco, the only thing he could give old soldiers who had known him; he handed out some to the two men, and caught a breathless mutter from King Hal.

"For God's love, make her cheerful! She's in a bad way."

Then he and Fluellen were off with their cudgels and a rusty sword, first unsaddling the nag. Vaughn came to the girl and held her hand, and looked into her tawny eyes; awkwardness filled him, but her laughter dispelled it.

"Sit here and talk, Harry Vaughn! As we used to talk in Beeston Castle, lad. . . . Have you found out any more about the Swan of Avon and his friendship with your family?"

Vaughn broke into a laugh, as he settled down beside her.

"My interest has been in staying alive, and not in Shakespeare; he's not much thought of these days, except by occasional players, such as survive. Now tell me about your illness."

This, he concluded, was a quartan ague similar to his own; and aside from the benefit given by the Jesuits' bark, her condition was in no way alarming. Why had King Hal said she was in a bad way? For a long time, he could find no answer to this query.

The old spell of her magic, which had so enchanted him in Beeston, fell upon him once again full force. With her ragged boy's garments and cropped yellow hair, her slim brown body and brown hard features, she might pass well enough for a lad; she had bitter need of the disguise, these days. But to Vaughn those tawny eyes and the husky, throaty voice carried all the blazing spirit of the woman within her, aged far beyond her years by peril and privation.

"In Beeston," she said, smiling, "you used to talk of the fine holland sheets, scented with rosemary and lavender, you would sleep in when you got home again. Did you find them?"

"Gone," said Vaughn, "like everything else I dreamed. All is gone."

"But not the dreams," she rejoined softly. "If we lose everything else, the dream remains, Harry Vaughn. I had, and still have, a dream for you. Do you share it still?"

"It's born again this day." His heart went out to her; he kissed her swiftly, eagerly. "I thought you dead; I heard it from what I thought a sure source. I've had a bad time of it myself. The winter was cruel."

"It was cruel to us all, my dear. Father said that you had forgotten us; but I knew better."

SILENCE, breeder of words, enfolded them. Thought of Catherine came to him, and he pushed it away; little placid Catherine! He got out the things he had brought, the scraps of herbs and unguents, and the dress. Dionys cried aloud with delight at sight of it, but would only touch it with her fingertips, and eye it with hungry palpitant breath.

"Not now—later, inside there, when it's safer!" she said, glancing at the cavern mouth. "How lovely it is! How strange it will be, to wear woman's gear again! As though no longer were death and ruin everywhere, and one could sing and dance again, and live in quiet homes amid peace

and love—" She broke off, and sighed. "Do you remember the pretty words you wrote me about the soul? I have done it often."

VAUGHN shook his head. It was far away and lost. "I have forgotten."

"I haven't." She smiled, and quoted the words. "*Go candidly to the soul, my child, and hearken there to what may be heard at dusk or at any quiet time. Only in these restful moments may you come close to that which is more fleeting than a bright-winged bird and more enduring than a stone! There is strength and power only within you.*"

"True; I remember now," he said, nodding. "Why, Dionys, you make the whole world seem different! Yesterday it was a hard thing even to live; today life's precious and full of hope, as though all the evil might yet pass! And last night the stars came close."

"The evil will pass," she said, as he paused. "Remember how you used to quote Bacon's letter written to your father, long ago?"

He nodded again. "*The gallant soul shall strain and not lose me, saith the Truth; the wrath that rageth shall pass her lightly by. Evil shall fall away, as the dust, quenched by the rain, falls from the stone.*"

"It is true, it is true!" Like a leaping flame rose her voice. "Just as we have found each other again, so the world shall come right once more; it must! We shall go to London together, Harry Vaughn, in those brave days, and the fame I prophesied for you in Beeston Castle shall come to you."

"Fame, to me?" He smiled. "And to you, perhaps?"

"No." She regarded him gravely, yet with a passionate conviction. "I know what you can do with words, with poems, with letters; and I know that I have the ability to kindle and keep alight this divine fire in you. Call it love or what you like, the result is one. I can do this."

"The mere fact of knowing you alive, did it last night," he said. "Yes, it's true. With you in my mind, with your love and confidence, I can find strange words, mystic powers of speech, thoughts that shimmer with light like very jewels!"

"And as our fathers called Shakespeare the Swan of Avon," she went on, "so our children will give you a name—the Swan of Usk."

He smiled. "Isn't there some legend that the swan sings only when about to

die? But that's not the point; the swan is the ancient bird of Britain, true."

"That's why the name is given; not for poetry, but for nobility!" she exclaimed. "The Swan of Usk. . . . I like that name."

"*Olor Iscanus*," he said, putting the title into Latin. "A quaint conception, surely! I must write a poem to that title."

"You said that last night the stars came close—"

He looked out at the fading afternoon sunlight through the trees.

"Yes. Like the Roundhead I pistoled in the Rowton fight—I saw a vision of all eternity." His voice came softly, his gray eyes were wide. "Like a great ring of pure and endless light in which all the races of men were moving; and there was no death. It came to me that heaven is hope, is energy, and that what death means is only another life. Differ as they may, at the last all men are kin, in that they all know something but none knows death; the sense of something supernal is one bond among them all. No other link can exist among the races of men except the negative one: they all know there is a thing they do not know."

He fell silent, then resumed slowly:

"Strange words, strange thoughts! When will man cease to be a beast of prey and of burden, as we are today? When will man remember that not only was he created in the image of his gods—but he himself had created most of them? Our life is a hurry and scurry between the legs of a row of giant fates, who are fog if we but knew it. We have a natural right to enjoy the minutes—the years are only their sum. What niceties of the grand march from dark to dark are lost, through man's deep ignorance of his own privileges!"

HIS words died away. He drew a deep breath, turned to the intent girl beside him, and smiled.

"You see to what strange fancies you lead me, Dionys! Except for you, I'd draw out of the world; no more soldiering, no more scholarship, merely a quiet humdrum existence blind to everything in life except the hobbling duties of the day. I had determined to follow this course, be a physician here in a forgotten nook of Wales, marry some placid lass who would perhaps love me a little, and drown out all beyond. But with you, the stars sing and the river whispers strange words, and soaring mystic fancies take fire within me."

She clung to him for a long, breathless moment, and he saw there were tears on her face. Drawing away, she looked him in the eyes.

"Swan of Usk!" Her deep, rich voice flowed into him. "Promise me that whatever happens, you will write the poem to this title, that you will become truly the Swan of Usk."

He broke in, smiling: "I'll do it, yes, whatever happens; but only because you ask it. What you inspire lies beyond this world. We've found each other, and there shall be no more loss, no parting."

WHEN the blessed daylight was thinning, figures appeared among the trees. Dionys called, and they came in, fearfully; two were women, sunken-eyed skeleton figures, though not old, and three were men—ghastly croaking creatures, cropped of ears and with inhuman faces, yet preserving the remnants of modulated voices used to courtly speech. Former players, these, joined up during the winter; Vaughn knew none of them.

Dionys introduced him; the greetings were joyful, for all had heard of him, and most of them needed his ministrations sorely. They were joyful aside from this, declaring that he had brought them huge luck, for one woman had a bird, not freshly dead but still good for the pot, and the men had a fat trout they had angled from the river, and two dormice—such a feast as they had not known in days.

"But there be signs o' death and raiders about," said one; "and by the river we saw two naked men hanged to a tree, fresh done, their hands cut off and tied about their necks."

"That'll be done by the mountain men," said Vaughn. "They caught two raiders and hanged 'em. The Welsh give these rogues short shrift. Here, let's have a look at your bad eye."

He fell to work, with the instruments and herbs he always carried with him. The women bustled off inside the workings with Dionys, to get supper started.

Vaughn was still laboring by the last daylight, cleansing an infected foot, when King Hal and Fluellen showed up, and amid shouts of jubilation showed their plunder—a brace of rabbits, summer-fat. To Vaughn, the loud ecstasies of these wretched folk were pitiful, although for the matter of that, he himself had not seen a rabbit in the pot for a long while.

His task done, Vaughn went to the spring to wash, and King Hal went with



him. He had never known the gaunt man's proper name; he had not asked, and King Hal had ever kept it secret, as though in bitter shame of what was become so tarnished. It occurred to him now to ask, since he had resolved to take Dionys home with him to Newton and there wed her. Before he could do so, however, King Hal spoke darkly:

"Is she smiling again? Aye, she must be; there's an air of cheer about the place."

Vaughn recollected his words. "You did wrong to say she's in a bad way, King Hal; no such thing! She's ill, yes, but in no peril."

"I spoke of grisly ills beyond your knowledge," said the other man gloomily. "She's been prating of death and evil, saying she'd not leave this place alive. God give that your coming has changed all that!"

"Perhaps it has; at all events, she's cheerful enough. Here, take a bit more tobacco, and I'll tether my horse more securely."

"He may betray us, that horse, if any wandering rascals come past—but we'll

chance that," said the other. "I've seen no one. By the gods, what a feast is ahead!"

DESPITE his campaigning across harried broken England, Vaughn found the place and the crew a strange and weird reality. The iron-workings went into the hillside some thirty feet, widening out at the back, but with a low rock ceiling. Rushlights lit it. A cooking-fire at the entrance was shrouded from sight of any wanderers by rags hung on sticks and by a big shield of wattles. And the lass Dionys wore her gown of yellow damask like a queen.

A queen? Vaughn caught his breath at sight of her; never before had he seen her in any but boy's garments. With a wreath of grasses on her cropped hair, she was become all woman, gloriously so! He dropped to one knee and kissed her hand, and King Hal roared approval.

"You'll play *Catherine of France* with us tonight, wench!" quoth he. "We'll do the play as we did it in Beeston Castle, remember? And you'll be royal *Catherine*, *Prince Hal's* merry *Kate*."



King Hal came staggering backward into the glimmer of the rushlights; after him a grim booted man who thrust him through. Dionys screamed.

Catherine? Why, so it was; the same name. Vaughn had not thought of it before, and he would have stopped the game; too late now, for King Hal was telling the others of it, amid high approbation.

In Beeston Castle there had been a tattered prompt-book; here there was none, but it was not needed, for some of them knew all the lines by heart. The big pot bubbled and steamed until famished bellies could no longer be gainsaid and they pitched in. Still King Hal talked on; he was like a man drunk with joy this night, poor gaunt wastage!

Vaughn had to tell them here, ■ he had told in Beeston, how Will Shakespeare had hidden out with the Vaughns of Trebarry when Warwickshire was too hot to hold him, for deer-killing. So it came that the playwright had put the Vaughn family into two or three of his plays, and much garbled Welsh lore besides, such as *Puck* and the mythical limping Davy Gam, or Llewellyn, who became Fluellen, and so forth. And the lass Dionys lighted the wretched cave like a daughter of the sun.

The feast drew to a close, though not until the pot was scraped clean. Then clearance was made; the two women carried the pot outside; King Hal and two of the men bore out the shabby dishes and mugs—and suddenly arose a great shriek that chilled the blood, ■ medley of shouts and oaths and a bellowing discharge of several shots.

KING HAL came staggering into the glimmer of the rushlights, spouting blood, and after him a grim booted man who thrust him through with savage blade, so that he fell and died as he fell. Dionys screamed once, and the man with the blade laughed aloud.

"To me, comrades!" he shouted. "To me! Here's ■ young 'un!"

"And something else," cried Vaughn, sword out at last, horror in his heart, the sight of Dionys crouching over her dead father spurring him with agony.

He darted forward; then he halted. The intruder, his blade half raised, drew back. The two men stared.

"Lieutenant Harry Vaughn o' Price's Horse! Sink me if it aint!"

"And you're Langlade of the Guards!" Vaughn choked suddenly on his anger. "Why, ye damned bloody murderers, what d'ye mean by this deviltry?"

Faces and booted figures filled up the opening behind Langlade; the shrieks outside had ceased. Fierce eyes stared. Langlade of the Life Guards—a ragged filthy shape now.

"Out o' the way with 'un, Langlade!" A roar of voices went up. They could all see the girl's figure in the rushlight. "Down with him! String 'em all up and take the lass!"

Langlade tried to quell them by shouting that Vaughn was a king's man and an officer. They only cursed the more and shoved forward.

"Your fellows hanged two of our men today," cried Langlade.

"You lie!" retorted Vaughn. "The Welsh hung them, and good riddance!"

FOR a moment he daunted the lot of them, ordering them out and away; authority spoke in him. Then someone yelped about food and a lass; a storm of wild oaths and shouts went up. A pistol belched smoke, then another. Through the rolling smoke weapons slithered forward, and men pressed in. Langlade cursed and drove in a savage thrust with his blade. Vaughn parried it and gave him the point through the throat.

Another pistol; the fire seared him; the ball pricked at his thigh. He flung himself at them like a madman, thrusting, cutting, battering with the big hilt of his rapier. It was like Edgehill or Rowton Heath again—wild faces through the smoke, savage voices shouting, death everywhere.

They broke; they drew back before him, only to gather and hurl in upon him. He knew this was the end, and fought the more. In the midst of it, a shrill cry went up outside, a blaring shout of warning and alarm, drowned by an outburst of savage Welsh voices screaming for blood.

Now they broke indeed, crowding out again for very life; but not a man of them reached the waiting horses, for the mountain men were upon them, with bill and scythe and knife. Vaughn, panting and coughing from the powder-fumes, found his wound a mere scratch, shouted his name at half a dozen Welshmen making for the entrance, and was recognized and greeted. Then he turned, to care for the lass Dionys.

And in the sudden silence, his heart went cold, to stay cold forever.

She looked up at him in the rushlight, one hand pressed to her breast where the blood welled out over the yellow damask. He fell on his knees beside her, felt for the wound, and knew the worst; one of those bullets had stricken her.

"You said—you said a lovely thing." Her voice came faintly, and a shadowy smile touched her lips. "All that death means is another life—"

He was frozen, incapable of speech or movement.

"The Swan of Usk. . . . Your promise. . . . You will remember?"

He stooped and kissed her lips.

"I will. . . . I will remember."

That was all she heard.

He awakened, after a long while, to find Welshmen around him, staring, waiting. The place was filled with the raw scent of blood. Langlade was dead; his men were strung up outside. To the mountain men, Vaughn was known intimately; one of them spoke to him, and he answered in Welsh, almost mechanically.

"She must be buried. And he, her father. He was a king."

He was like a man bemused; they could get no sense out of him, but what he had just said went around. The word passed that this dead man was no other than Gwyn ap Nudd, the king of the little people, and the dead girl was his daughter; awed, the men of the mountains filed out and prepared the graves.

WHEN Henry Vaughn rode away toward the brawling river and the road home, the glory of life had come, and gone again. As he rode, chin drooping on chest, letting the sorry nag take its own pace, he saw what the remainder of life must mean to him; a play whose lines would go unsaid, like this play of King Hal and French Kate which had ended ere it began. A dreary round of years wherein he would move like a shadow under the cold stars. . . .

The Swan of Usk. . . . He looked up at the stars, and tears glittered on his cheeks. What was it she had said? A lovely thing—all that death means is another life! But for him, life had ended back there when the sods fell upon her. The vista that outstretched before him, the long years of emptiness and petty humdrum detail, and the memory of a dream that was dead. He had nothing else left. . . . Like many another man.

Another story in "The World Was Their Stage" will appear in our February issue.

TWO SHORT NOVELS

THE FUN FARM MURDER

*A thrill-crammed murder mystery which starts in
a deserted amusement park.*

By THOMAS DUNCAN



HEIRS *of the* BLUE SKY

A story of old times and new in the plane-building industry.

By ANDREW WOOD

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



Illustrated by Orson Lowell

"You think they came here and killed Mike and kidnaped Sally?"

THE FUN FARM MURDER

By THOMAS DUNCAN

*Who wrote "My Corpse Hangs in the Barn"
and "The Dance of Death."*

AFTERWARD, Cliff Boyd remembered several little danger-signals that should have warned him. But on that Sunday night in October, he was keyed up too much to bother. Life tasted good, that night.

As his car left the suburbs and skimmed along toward the Fun Farm Park, seven miles north of the city, he was smiling. The park was closed for the season now, but Sally Kerrigan would be waiting for him. She lived there.

"Imagine!" she sometimes sang out. "Living with a Ferris wheel in your front yard. And a Fun Farm mirror that makes you look fat."

And Cliff Boyd always moaned:

"Nothing's wrong with that mirror. Have you weighed yourself lately?"

Then, pretending to be outraged, she'd yank his hat-brim over his eyes, or ruffle his sandy hair.

"Smarty! And you're the man who told me I had a nice figure."

"Best in town. I mean in the country. I mean in the world."

"Huh! That's more like it, Mr. Boyd."

Then they'd laugh, and probably kiss. They were like that—always very gay, always kidding. Nice citizens. Much too nice to get mixed up with a murder.

They were going to be married next month, after Cliff was elected sheriff.

He was late tonight; so Sally would be waiting at the park gate, instead of in the caretaker's bungalow where she lived with her uncle, Mike Kerrigan. It had become a humorous tradition for her to meet him there when he was late.

"Well, Mr. Boyd!" she'd say. "Late again, eh? All I want for a wedding present is a nice tough rolling-pin!"

And he'd say, "Listen, Sally: Something swell's happened. Schwartz called

me at six, and we met in my office. He's promised me twenty thousand votes from the Fifth Ward."

Cliff Boyd pressed the gas harder, his smile broadening. Twenty thousand votes! A quarrel had blazed up between Schwartz and Cecil Prince, the present sheriff, and so Schwartz was going to take vengeance by tossing the whole Fifth Ward into Boyd's lap. And he hadn't demanded a single promise in return!

Not that it would have done him any good, if he had. Boyd was making no promises—except to wade into that courthouse and give it a cleaning. He was twenty-seven, so honest that last year his law practice had netted him exactly \$809.61. But his honesty had harvested for him the reform group's nomination for sheriff.

At a crossroad his headlights illuminated a sign, "FUN FARM PARK, ONE MILE," and his big, freckled hands pulled the wheel and sent the car eastward. Down there in the valley, ghostly in the light of the half-moon, mist was rising from the river that curved past the park. And in the passing fields, cornstalks were shocked like Indian wigwams, and fat pumpkins sparkled frostily.

SWINGING in at the park gate, he pressed the brake, but Sally didn't appear from the shadows of the ticket-seller's kiosk. He thumbed the horn. And immediately, for some odd reason, he wished he hadn't. Just some vague hunch. Shrugging, he drove on.

Tonight the park was a place of ghosts. In the thin moonlight the roller coaster glimmered like the skeleton of some fabulous beast. The park street curved past the dance pavilion and straightened toward the caretaker's bungalow at the

edge of the picnic timber. Rounding that corner, Boyd beheld another car.

It was a black sedan, coming toward him very fast in second gear. Its lights were off, and in the shaft of his own headlights, its windshield gleamed in a dull and somehow sinister blindness. Boyd glimpsed several shadows inside the car, and then his gaze was crammed with powerful brilliance as the blank headlights blazed on. The car streaked past. He caught the impression of figures in the back seat, and somebody beside the driver. Of the man at the wheel he had a fleeting glimpse—a lean-faced man with high cheekbones.

He slammed on the brakes and jumped out, running back to the corner. Twin red tail-lights grinned back as the sedan shot through the gate, made a squealing curve and fled eastward.

It had been automatic—his chasing back to the dance-pavilion corner. Why had he done it? All the nerve-fraying stress of his political campaign was making him jumpy, Cliff Boyd guessed. Probably it had been a carload of drunks, joyriding through the deserted park. Feeling a little foolish, he trudged back to his car and drove on past the Old Red Mill, toward Mike Kerrigan's bungalow.

BUT, as the caretaker's dwelling swung into sight, his nerves tightened rather than relaxed. For the bungalow was dark. That was odd! Always Sally had the porch light brightly greeting him, when she wasn't waiting at the park gate. And why weren't the living-room lights on?

He should have phoned her. He was more than an hour late. Maybe she was being independent, giving him a lesson in promptness. Perhaps she'd asked her Uncle Mike to drive her out somewhere, just so she'd be gone when he arrived.

But that possibility vanished as he turned into the driveway, and his headlights flooded Mike Kerrigan's flivver in the garage.

As he switched off the motor and snapped open the car door, he was struck by the moon-haunted silence of the abandoned park. The silence of autumn, of death. Somewhere on a distant ridge a dog was scolding the lonely moon, and in the grass the season's last cricket peeped weakly.

He called, "Sally!"

The park buildings threw back a broken echo.

"Sally, it's Cliff! Sorry I'm late."

"I'm late, I'm late," the echoes lamented.

He climbed the steps, crossed the dark porch and groped out a hand, expecting to encounter the securely-locked front door. But when his knuckles grazed the door, it squeaked and floated inward. He stepped over the threshold and pawed the light-switch.

Then, in a brain-swaying instant, he knew that a phase of his life had ended, that never again would he call here for Sally and joke with her Uncle Mike Kerrigan. She wouldn't be living with her Uncle Mike any more—for that doughty little Irishman lay sprawled on the living-room rug, dead.

THERE had been a fight. On the wrinkled rug a chair lay on its side, and by the front window a stand with its potted fern had been scuffled over. The Irishman had gone down fighting.

He lay on his stomach in the middle of the room, pitched forward from a blow on the back of his head. Kneeling, Cliff Boyd caught his breath at the violence of that blow.

Something blunt and heavy had smashed his skull between the right ear and the medulla oblongata. That had been the ugliest blow, but others had followed or preceded it—a rain of blows on his cranium. The rug pillowing his head gleamed wet and scarlet.

The dead man's arms lay outstretched ahead of him, as if just before death he had been standing with his hands up. As if a confederate of the person holding the gun had stepped behind Mike Kerrigan and felled him.

Boyd tried to picture what had happened—at least two persons invading this room, covering Mike with a gun. . . . But something was wrong with that picture: The overturned furniture—the fight. Mike Kerrigan had known too much about guns to start fighting, once he was gazing at the wrong end of one. But perhaps Sally—

Sally! The shock of finding Mike dead had jostled even the thought of her from his mind, but now he jumped up, her name breaking from his lips.

"Sally!" he said again, sharply, but here in the bungalow not even an echo replied.

He strode to the dining-room and pressed the wall-switch; everything was in order there; and then, hurrying to the little hallway beyond, off which her bedroom opened, he stopped short.

THE FUN FARM MURDER

Perhaps beyond that closed door he would find her. Not alive.

Seldom in his life had Cliff Boyd been afraid, but he was now. Afraid of what he'd find in her room. He guessed it was about the bravest thing he had ever done, twisting the doorknob with shaky fingers, elbowing the door, switching on the light.

His lungs expelled his breath in a rush of relief. She was not there. But the memory of her was there. To his nostrils there shimmered the odor—light and fragrant and heady—which he always associated with her.

On her dresser his photograph smiled out from a silver frame; and with a pang he remembered how she had flung her arms about his neck and kissed him when he gave that to her.

He wheeled from the room, smothering a desire to dash into his car and speed from the park on the trail of that sedan. They had not been drunks—he was sure of that, now. They had been killers. Why on earth they had murdered Mike Kerrigan, he couldn't imagine; but the chances were that Sally was in that car now, screaming against a palm clamped over her mouth.

That clenched his fists. He wanted to fling himself on their trail. But cold logic told him that already they were miles away; better to call the State police before chasing off half-cocked as a one-man posse.

He grabbed up the dining-room telephone, but he heard nothing. Just the blank silence of a dead line.

He slammed down the instrument, grinding a "Damn" between his teeth. Probably they had cut the phone wire outside the bungalow.

FOR a second he stood in thought. He'd go to the nearest filling-station to phone out the alarm. But first, maybe the smart thing would be to spend a minute giving the house the once-over. His meager description of a black sedan wouldn't be much help to the State cops; maybe he could discover something to indicate who the killers were.

He swung back to the bedroom hallway, shooting fast glances into the bathroom and Kerrigan's bedroom, but nothing seemed amiss. Then he switched on the kitchen lights.

He saw newspapers—newspapers scattered on the table, on the floor. Sally always kept a stack for wrapping; but why were they littered around this way?

From one paper something was missing; he picked it up. It was the front page of the *Morning Chronicle*, dated a week ago last Friday, with a jagged piece some two columns wide torn out.

Who had torn it out? Mike? Sally? Or Mike's slayer?

No time to moon over that. He strode back to the living room, kneeling by Mike Kerrigan, and patted his hip pockets. The dead man's wallet was there; Boyd pulled it out. Seven dollars in currency rustled inside. Not robbery, then; just murder.

His gaze moved along Kerrigan's outstretched arms; the right hand lay open, but the left fingers were clutched together. He pried them open. A piece of cardboard, folded and crumpled, tumbled out.

Unfolding it, Cliff Boyd was startled by his own photograph, his own name. It was one of the "*Boyd for Sheriff*" campaign cards that his organization had printed. Then, in one corner, he saw the penciled numerals: "4-6137."

HIS brow furrowed. What did the numbers mean? A phone-number? But why had Kerrigan scribbled them on a campaign card?

He slipped the card into his vest pocket and stood up, scrutinizing the floor. By the front window he gazed down at the wrecked fern-pot. The fern lay in a tangle, and sticking out from the dirt that had scattered when the pot broke, he saw a tiny cardboard cylinder.

It was the hollow mouthpiece of a cigarette—an expensive foreign cigarette. In tobacco stores he had seen such cigarettes—with a cardboard mouthpiece attached to each one. A half-inch of unsmoked butt was attached to this one; but instead of a brand-name, the cigarette paper was stamped with a hollow diamond, enclosing the letter "R."

Neither Mike nor Sally smoked that kind of pretentious cigarette. The "R" stood for someone's name, he decided, but whose? He tucked the stub into his pocket, examined the room further.

He peered beneath Mike's favorite overstuffed chair, seeing nothing; but under the davenport he glimpsed something round that had rolled against the wall. Jerking out the davenport, he picked up a stone about half the size of a cantaloupe.

It was oddly colored. A third of its surface remained rock-gray, but the rest had been gilded with golden paint. He

had seen such a rock before. But where? Not in this house, certainly.

And then he noted some reddish-brown specks freckling the golden paint. He touched one; it was faintly moist; it left a slight smear on his forefinger.

Blood!

His hand went nerveless for an instant as he realized he was holding the stone that had battered Mike Kerrigan's skull. He gripped it harder, stared at it. Why was a third of it unpainted? And where had he seen such a stone—like a nugget?

SUDDENLY Cliff's memory flashed to him a picture of many such stones, arranged to form letters. In the crushed-rock parking yard of a shabby roadhouse they spelled out the name of the place—"Golden Nugget." And that roadhouse was located only three miles east of Fun Farm Park.

Flipping out his handkerchief, he wrapped the stone and dropped it into his coat pocket. He'd rush over there to phone the State police, to query the proprietor. But striding toward the door he halted, listening.

Coming along the park street, he heard the *put-put-put* of a motorcycle.

His first wild thought was of a murderer returning, and he imagined the excellent target he'd be, unarmed in this lighted room. He jumped for the light-switch and snapped the room full of blackness. Then he glided over the threshold and plunged into the deep shadows at the far end of the veranda.

The motorcycle stopped in the driveway, and in the smudge of light from the single headlight beam, a squat man was revealed. As he swung off the saddle, Boyd saw that his roly-poly body wore a uniform; a deputy sheriff's badge gleamed on his barrel chest.

His name was Tubby Gunderson, and Boyd knew him. Decidedly! He had mentioned him in enough speeches attacking the reign of Sheriff Cecil Prince. Not that Gunderson was better or worse than any of Prince's deputies—he was merely typical. Just a blockhead who owed his job to the votes he swung in a rural precinct.

"Hey, Mike," he bawled out, trudging up the walk. "Why'd you turn off the lights?"

So he had seen the bungalow go dark. Boyd thought fast, and then made a decision.

"Mike didn't," he said, stepping forward. "I did."

The response to that was a beam of light from a flashlight in Gunderson's paw. It swept Boyd from toes to eyes.

"Uh," Gunderson grunted. "It's you. Where's Mike?"

"Inside."

Gunderson attempted heavy humor.

"Holdin' his head, I'll bet, about the guy his niece is going to marry."

"No," Boyd said. "He's dead."

"What you say?"

Boyd stepped into the living-room and turned on the lights.

"He's been killed," he said, and briefly told what he knew. But not all he knew. He mentioned the rock and brought it from his pocket, but he didn't reveal his suspicions that it came from the Golden Nugget. He didn't want Gunderson blundering into the case. He was saving the cream of the clues for the State cops—they had brains.

Gunderson's heavy fingers took the handkerchief-wrapped rock, as he scowled from it to Kerrigan's body. He said nothing, but his breath rustled in and out over his protruding under-lip. Finally, wrapping the rock in the handkerchief again, he thrust it into his pocket.

"I LIKED Mike," he said.

He prowled about the room, frowning. He took off his cap and scratched his fingers through the short blond hair growing coarsely from his skull.

He said: "You say you saw a sedan leaving. What makes you think the guys in the sedan done it?"

"There was nobody else—"

"You think they came here and killed Mike and kidnaped Sally?"

"Mike's dead. And Sally's gone."

Gunderson cleared his heavy throat against the frog that perpetually hoarsened it. "Mike left word for me to come here, about forty minutes ago. He came driving like hell into the Super-service Filling Station over on Highway 5. I kind of headquarter there, but I was gone. The boys were busy with a car when Mike came steaming in. He yelled and told them to send me over here fast. Then he drove on, hell-bent."

"Didn't he say why he wanted you?"

"He didn't wait long enough. Just yelled that it was mighty important for me to get here. I was out chasing speeders. Soon as I got back to the station, they told me, and I came right away."

That puzzled Boyd. He said:

"Look, Gunderson: You go call the coroner and your office. I'll call the State

THE FUN FARM MURDER

cops. We're wasting time here. Sally's in that sedan, and—"

"Wait!" Gunderson commanded, and Boyd paused at the door. "Come here. Do you have a gun?"

"Not on me. It's in my car."

"Didn't think you had one on you," Gunderson said, pulling out his .38. "You wouldn't have used this rock on Mike if you had."

Boyd stared at Tubby Gunderson. His face, with its red-slabbed jowls and pale-blue eyes, was a mass of hatred.

"Don't be a damned fool," Boyd said.

"You've called me that before, in them speeches of yours. I don't like it. If you call me that again, I'll plug you. Put up your hands. You're under arrest for murdering Kerrigan."

Boyd lifted his hands; the fellow meant just what he said. Whether he actually thought he had caught Mike's killer, or whether he was taking petty revenge for those political thrusts, Boyd didn't know. He said:

"This is crazy. I saw a sedan, I tell you! It's getting farther away while we fool around here. Sally—"

"Can it. You'll have a chance to talk—later."

And suddenly Cliff Boyd realized that bad luck had maneuvered him into as bad a mess as a man could dream in a week of nightmares. He knew only too well the corruption of the sheriff's office. Catching Kerrigan's killer would be of no consequence to Sheriff Prince, if only he could maul a confession from Boyd.

THE set-up was perfect. He had been discovered here, that rock in his pocket. Men had gone to the chair with less circumstantial evidence than a clever prosecutor could weave around him.

And after his attacking speeches, how Prince would love to give him the works! How he would enjoy telling the newspapers, "Boyd's confessed." The sheriff's office would get credit for solving a crime; and more important, Prince would assure his own re-election. Enough voters would believe that Boyd confessed of his own volition to blow the reform group's chances higher than a stratosphere balloon.

But as these thoughts flashed through his brain, he realized that it was something more than his own plight that filled him with desperation.

It was Sally.

She had been seized, whisked away—possibly because she had witnessed the



"Give me that phone!" Gunderson ordered. Boyd gave it to him—hard!

slaying. Those killers would read the papers. How they would chuckle! And they'd have vast leisure to kill her, too, stilling her lips forever. And to attach weights to her body and drop it into the depths of some river or lake. . . .

Gunderson said:

"Go into the dining-room and turn on the lights. I've got you covered, so don't try no funny stuff."

His hands high, his legs feeling as if they were hollow, Boyd obeyed.

"All right," Gunderson said. "Pick up the phone and dial the sheriff's office. The number's 3-8971. My hands are too busy to hold a phone. You're going to send in the call for more deputies."

"I told you—the line's dead—"

"Sure," Gunderson snorted, "you told me a lot of stuff. All about a black sedan. Now dial that number—"

And suddenly a plan streaked through Boyd's thoughts.

"All right, Gunderson," he muttered. "You've got me. I thought I could outsmart you, but I was wrong."

"I aint never been outsmarted yet."

It was a French-type phone; Boyd clamped the receiver end very tightly against his ear and dialed. The line was completely blank, but for Gunderson's scowling benefit he asked for Sheriff Prince and then poured a complete confession into the mouthpiece.

"What's that?" he concluded. "You want to talk to Gunderson? Well, I

don't know. He's pretty busy just now, holding a gun on me. What? A promotion? Well—"

Blinking, Gunderson edged forward, his left hand yearning out.

"Give it to me."

Boyd took a backward step, still talking.

"Give me that phone!" Gunderson ordered.

"Sure," Boyd said, and gave it to him.

He gave it to him hard.

He moved on the balls of his feet, his athletic body moving with fast and perfect coördination. Holding the cross-bar in his right hand, he picked up the dial portion of the instrument in his left.

He stepped toward Gunderson. Using the phone base as a bludgeon, his left hand plunged out and smacked the deputy's right wrist—his gun wrist—battering the revolver aside. It barked, once, but not till after its barrel had been swept out of range. And an instant later Boyd's right fist, clutching the cross-bar, jabbed a swift uppercut toward the deputy's jaw.

IT was better than brass knucks. The cuplike mouthpiece hit the corner of Gunderson's jaw in a jolting sleep-maker. At the same moment Boyd's fist punched the side of the man's face, and to finish the job he whacked his skull with the receiver end of the cross-bar.

Gunderson staggered.

Dropping the phone, Boyd's left fingers clamped the other's gun-wrist. The gun clattered to the floor. And his right fist crashed up again into Gunderson's jaw, completing the job by jerking back and plowing hard into the man's solar plexus.

Gunderson dropped like a charging rhinoceros hit by a cannon-ball.

Boyd snatched up his gun, pocketed it; and then, bringing out the handkerchief-wrapped rock, pocketed that too. Rolling Gunderson over, he grappled his collar and dragged him to the hallway and on into Kerrigan's bedroom.

He flipped back the bed-covers, yanked off the sheets. These he tore into strips. Three minutes later the deputy's wrists and ankles were tightly bound, and Boyd pulled him into the bedroom closet, locked the door, pocketed the key.

Then, switching off all lights, he trotted from the bungalow, boosted Gunderson's motorcycle out of the way, backed from the driveway, sped through the park gate and turned east.

Assault and battery, resisting arrest, murder—he guessed that Cecil Prince would have enough charges against him to keep the whole county attorney's staff busy. Oh, yes—larceny, too. Gunderson's revolver.

On the long bridge spanning the river east of the park, Boyd halted, stepped out and flung that revolver over the rail. He heard a distant splash. In his car again, he brought his automatic from a door-pocket, examined it, drove on.

He was thinking of Sally Kerrigan.

THE Golden Nugget called itself a roadhouse. A low, rambling structure, it looked as if it had begun life as a lunch-car.

Driving into its crushed-rock parking lot, Cliff Boyd saw that he had caught the place in its mid-evening off-hour.

Assuming nonchalance, he strolled toward the door.

In the middle of the parking lot he paused to light a cigarette. Several matches went out before their flames reached the tobacco, possibly because he blew on them. This gave him the opportunity to scrutinize the plot of ground by which he had halted.

Raised slightly from the parking lot, it looked like a rectangular flower-bed. Golden stones rimmed it, but no flowers bloomed there. Instead, more golden stones formed the words *Golden Nugget*.

His gaze moved over those stones. One letter, the "t" in *Nugget*, looked incomplete. Boyd leaned over, untied a shoelace, tied it again.

From the tail of the "t" a stone was missing.

His hand came from his pocket, carrying something. Now he found it necessary to bend over and tie his other shoe. When he straightened, the "t" no longer looked incomplete.

The stone that had crashed Mike Kerrigan's skull fitted exactly into a cupped-out depression in the ground. He left it there and sauntered into the roadhouse.

Only two or three booths were occupied—by unsuspecting-looking young couples. At the cash register, a woman with varnish-colored hair leaned her elbows on the counter.

Boyd turned on his smile. He was, he said, a candidate for sheriff; he brought campaign cards from his pocket and started to say that he'd like to leave them.

"I know all about you," the woman said. "Look."

THE FUN FARM MURDER

She pointed to a stack of such cards. "Mike Kerrigan," she added, "has told my husband and me all about you."

"You know Mike?"

"I'll say we do. He's always stopping in."

"Has he—been in today?"

"Yeah—he was here. About an hour ago. He drove over to buy some tobacco."

Boyd said carelessly:

"Then maybe you can tell me: I've just been at the park, and he wasn't there. Sally Kerrigan wasn't, either. I had an appointment with them, but I was late. Did Mike mention going any place else—when he left here?"

The woman shot him a queerly troubled glance. And to a waitress she called: "Arlena!" When the girl responded, the cashier said: "Hold down this spot for a minute." And to Boyd: "Let's go in here. It's quieter."

Opening a door marked "Office," she ushered Boyd into a little cubby with files and a roll-top desk.

"Sit down," she said. "You don't suppose anything's happened to Mike, do you?"

"Happened to him? How do you mean?" He passed her a cigarette, lighted a match.

"There's been some funny business here tonight," she said, breathing out smoke. "Claude—that's my husband—is home in bed with the flu. So I've been managing the joint. If Claude'd been here, I don't think he would have let them take it—"

"Take what?"

"Maybe," the woman said, "I'd better start at the beginning. . . . Do you know a sawed-off little squirt who wears eyeglasses on a black ribbon? Name of Fritz Skanlon?"

KNOW him! He's the slickest shyster in town. Or—was. He was disbarred six months ago. Think he's in real estate now."

"If he'd sell a lot, I'll bet it'd turn out to be quicksand," Mrs. Rasmussen said. "Well, he was in here this afternoon—along late in the afternoon. Know what he wanted?"

"Probably," Boyd said, "he wanted to skin the gold off the goldfish."

The woman shook her head. "This will floor you. He wanted—so help me—to buy our pin-ball machine, and for cash, too."

"Pin-ball!"

"You know—little steel balls. In goes a nickel—good-by, nick."

"Did you sell it?"

"Listen, do I look bugs? That machine aint ours. It belongs to the Happy Hours Pastime Company. Which means it belongs to Pete Blackholm. And it was full of nickels—tomorrow's collection day. Pete's got two or three assistants who pack guns, and cafés that have been fooled with his machines have been known to have mysterious explosions. Anyway, that's what the papers called 'em—'mysterious.'"

"Why did Skanlon want the machine?"

"He said he wanted it to give to a friend. As a present! I told him we didn't own it—he'd better call up Pete Blackholm. He said he'd called Pete's place, but Pete was out of town for the week-end. I told him huh-uh, no sir, I wasn't monkeying with any machine of Pete's. He offered me a hundred bucks for it."

"That's high, isn't it?"

"Can't tell. The machine might have had fifty or sixty bucks worth of nickels in it. But before he left, he was offering five hundred dollars for it, and I damned well know *that's* high."

"Didn't that much money—well—tempt you?" Cliff questioned.

MRS. RASMUSSEN grinned. "That kind of temptation don't have *any* temptation for me. I told this Skanlon guy he should go to Pete's place and try to buy some machine that wasn't in use. Some older model that people had got tired of playing. Nope—he wanted this one. And he had the flimsiest reason for wanting it. This friend of his—believe he called him a sick friend—this friend is a football fan. And this machine of ours was an imitation football game. So he had to have this one. 'You go buy your friend a ping-pong set,' I said. 'You aint going to get this machine.' He gave me a fishy stare and jittered out."

"But what's all this got to do with Mike Kerrigan?"

"Coming to that." She crushed out her cigarette, took a deep breath. "Early this evening three guys came here in a car. And they were cookies—boy, don't think they weren't! They sat in a booth and had a couple of rounds of drinks. Well—"

"Did one," Boyd broke in, "have a lean face and high cheekbones?"

"How'd you know that?"

"Just a guess."



"I know all about you," the woman said.

"You ought to take up guessing as a living," the woman said.

"Tell me some more about them."

"All right—this guy with high cheekbones: Black hair, dark eyes, sunken cheeks and the nice healthy complexion of a corpse. Then there was a fat guy—not so old—twenty-six, maybe. Brown hair and freckles, brown eyes that didn't miss a thing. Those eyes kept on the move all the time—just roaming around.

"They were cookies," Mrs. Rasmussen went on, "but the third one was the hard macaroon. Tall, with slick black hair. A jaw and lips and teeth that looked—well, powerful. 'Give me an iron bar, I want to bite off a chew'—that sort of mouth. He wore a black suit; when he walked, he reminded you of an Indian. About thirty, I'd say. He was the one who knew Kerrigan."

"Did Mike know him?"

"I'm not sure."

Deep corrugations roughed up Boyd's forehead. "Go on," he said.

"Well, these cookies sat drinking, as I said. After a couple of whiskies this guy in the striped suit got up and walked over to the pin-ball machine and looked it over. Put in a nickel and played it. Then he came over to the cash register and looked at me. His eyes were kind of—well, bright and fierce. It was hard to look into his eyes—like looking at the sun. He said: 'I want to talk to you.'

"My heart was ticking about three times as fast as usual, but I said kind

of chipper-like: 'Go ahead, brother. My ears are unbuttoned.'

"He said: 'It's business, private business.' And he jerked his head at the office, so I led the way in here. He moved along in that smooth Indian way about one hop behind me, and his two pals were just behind him.

"Once we were in here, he said he wanted to buy the pin-ball machine. I told him what I told Skanlon—that I couldn't sell, on account of Pete Blackholm. When I mentioned Pete, one corner of his mouth twitched a little, as if a fly had lit on it; and in the smooth, dark voice he said, 'Never heard of him. Lady, we're buying that machine.'

"'You mean you're sticking me up for it?' I said.

"'I mean I'm buying it,' he said. He reached out and took my hand, palm up. And he left these on it."

Mrs. Rasmussen's hand darted into the V of her dress, bringing out currency.

There were five one-hundred-dollar bills.

Boyd smoothed them out, and while Mrs. Rasmussen talked, he jotted down their serial numbers.

"What could I do?" Mrs. Rasmussen said. "My husband home in bed with the flu. . . . So I took the money and let them go ahead.

"While his two pals unscrewed the legs, this Indian-looking guy stood by the cash register, watching. I kept wondering why that pin-ball machine was so valuable. First Skanlon offering me five centuries for it, and then this guy.

THEN the door opened, and in came Mike Kerrigan. You know Mike—perky as a banty rooster. He tossed down his money and asked for a can of tobacco, not especially noticing this Indian-looking guy. But the guy noticed Mike, all right. He was glaring at him.

"Mike took his tobacco and looked over at the two cookies working on the pin-ball machine. 'What's the trouble?' Mike asked me. 'The machine go bad?'

"Then the Indian-guy spoke. If you've ever heard hate in anyone's voice! He snapped: 'What's it to you, Grandpa?'

"Mike looked up at him. He looked surprised—his mouth kind of fell open. And he looked scared, too—and it aint like Mike to scare easy.

"'Nothing—nothing' at all,' he said. By that time the two cookies were carrying the machine out to their car. Mike hot-hoofed it through the door after

THE FUN FARM MURDER

them, and I heard his flivver snort and race away.

"The Indian-guy lit a cigarette, and through that white smoke his face looked more dark-skinned than ever. He said to me: 'That little Mick's name is Kerrigan, aint it? Mike Kerrigan.' I said 'Sure.' And he said: 'Where's he live?' I said, 'Over at Fun Farm Park. He's the watchman. Why?'

"He was staring at the door—kind of dreamy-like. And when he spoke, he seemed to be talking more to himself than to me. 'The trouble with broads,' he said, 'is that they ask too many questions.' Then he walked out, never paying for the drinks. Maybe he figured those five C's covered the drinks.

"**R**IGHT away I called up Pete Blackholm's and told them what had happened. Pete was still out of town, but they were expecting him back any minute. I talked to Lefty Ghoss—he's closest to Pete. He was mad about losing the machine, of course. 'It aint that the C's don't cover it,' he kept saying. 'It's the idea of the thing.'"

Cliff Boyd brought out his cigarettes, deciding to tell this woman what had happened to Mike. As he held out the pack, she waved it aside.

"Try one of these," she said, "and feel snooty. Beer salesman gave 'em to my husband."

From the desk she brought a scarlet box. It was a humidor, with "*Czar's Special*" lettered in fancy script on the lid. It was half-full of cigarettes. Each was equipped with a hollow cardboard mouthpiece, and stamped on each one was a diamond enclosing the letter "R."

"Nice, aint they?" said Mrs. Rasmussen. "My husband's initial, and everything."

Cliff Boyd took one. And rising, he asked:

"Did you pass these to those thugs who took the pin-ball machine?"

"Huh," she snorted. "I'll say not. Like pearls before swine, as they say."

So Cliff Boyd left the Golden Nugget without mentioning Mike Kerrigan's death, after all. Outside, he drew the frosty air deep into his lungs, patted the automatic in his pocket. It looked like a busy evening, and he was not at all sure he would emerge from it alive. Better, perhaps, not to emerge alive—unless he could find Sally, unharmed. . . .

Question-marks whirled through Cliff Boyd's brain as he sped toward the city.

He felt like a man searching for a black cat in a blackout. And he drove in pain. Always when Sally was not by his side he experienced emptiness, and the events of this evening had intensified that to agony.

He tried to make his thoughts run clear and slow, but they poured through his mind with the crashing turbulence of flood waters in a cañon: Where was she? To find her he knew he must find the murderer of Kerrigan. That leader of the three thugs who took the pin-ball machine? Yes, a cat in a blackout.

He gripped the wheel, staring ahead at the outlying spangles of suburban lights rushing toward him. Fritz Skanlon. A thug who walked like an Indian. A cigarette-butt marked "R"—was Claude Rasmussen really sick with the flu? Or had he been waiting at the park tonight to kill Mike? Perhaps the woman's story of the thugs and Skanlon had been pure invention.

As the first subdivision lights flashed past his car, new tensions gripped his nerves. For if he was a hunter, he was also quarry.

BACK there in the bungalow, he had been wrought-up and excited, eager to get away; and it occurred to him now that Tubby Gunderson wouldn't need to be a Houdini to escape from those strips of sheeting and kick open the closet door. Gunderson would rush to a phone and broadcast the tidings that Cliff Boyd had slaughtered Kerrigan. Perhaps already he had done that.

So any help from the State police was out. Any help from anybody except himself was out. If the sheriff's office caught him, they'd simply beat him up. "You confessed to Gunderson—now sign this," they'd bark. The State police might listen to his story, and interview Mrs. Rasmussen (if she'd tell the same story twice), but that would waste precious hours. Hours during which Kerrigan's slayer could lose himself in another state.

He pulled up outside a suburban drug-store and left his car, feeling conspicuous as a naked man in a nightmare. But the soda clerk, kidding a girl at the fountain, gave him hardly a glance. Boyd shut a phone-booth door and grabbed up the telephone directory.

Skanlon. His home address slid beneath Boyd's forefinger: 1823 River Road Drive. Phone number: 4-9374.

That reminded him; he plucked out the campaign card he had pried from

Kerrigan's fingers and looked at the penciled numbers. But they were 4-6137.

Dropping a nickel into the slot, he dialed 4-6137.

A voice said: "Hotel Campbell."

"Wrong number—sorry," Boyd said.

Hotel Campbell. Why on earth had Kerrigan penciled that number? There were only six hundred guestrooms in Hotel Campbell.

Snatching up the phone-book, he riffled the pages to *Rasmussen, Claude*. Dialed the number. The phone rang a dozen times without an answer. Well, maybe Rasmussen's flu had him too sick to answer. Or maybe he wasn't there. And again the possibility that Rasmussen had killed Kerrigan went will-o'-the-wisping through his head. If so, maybe Sally had managed to escape into the timber; maybe she had plodded to some farmhouse to phone; maybe that car he had encountered in the park was just full of drunks, after all.

He left the booth, and in his car again entered a busy artery leading to the heart of town. He debated stopping at the *Chronicle* Building to pick up the paper for a week ago Friday—the paper he had discovered in the bungalow kitchen with a jagged piece ripped out of Page One. Just asking for more trouble, he decided. For if Gunderson had sweated loose and given out the alarm, the *Chronicle* would know it by now.

HE swung from the boulevard and threaded a few miles of side-streets, reaching River Road Drive. It was an ill-paved thoroughfare in an old part of town. Between the street and the river, great old houses were hulking shadows on dark lawns. Fifty years ago these had been affluent mansions, with graveled drives winding to the street and back lawns sloping down to their own beaches and bathhouses on the river. The same river which, seven miles upstream, flowed past Fun Farm Park.

Parking his car on a side-street, Boyd plucked a flashlight from the door-pocket and strode along the 1800 block. Most of the houses had been cut up into cheerily-bright apartments, but Skanlon's 1823 stood dark, withdrawn. The bushes rimming the lead-in sidewalk had grown wild, and their bony branches clawed at Boyd as he slipped quietly toward the gaunt stone veranda.

On the heavy front door, he found the iron handle of an old-fashioned doorbell, and yanked it. He waited, his auto-

matic ready. He could hear the bell pealing on the inside. Then the last echo tinkled into black silence.

He tiptoed through the shadows, following the veranda around to the side of the house. Another tall door stood there, buried in darkness. Locked! By its side he found a wide window, and with gloved fingers he tested it. Also locked.

He tapped his pistol-butt against the glass, above the latch, but the pane was heavy. He struck a harder blow; it crashed; and with his back against the wall, he stood motionless till a minute of silence had stilled the musical tinkling of glass. Then he reached through the jagged aperture, twisted the lock, wrestled open the window.

INSIDE, he encountered uncarpeted hardwood floors, and he risked a half-second of illumination from his flashlight. He saw a room that was bare save for dust and cobwebs. Not a stick of furniture. How come? Why had Skanlon listed a vacant house as his home?

Skanlon dealt in real estate now; possibly he had bought this old hulk for a song, intending to remodel it for apartments, and was occupying only a part of it. Boyd groped past the glazed-brick fireplace, through a wide doorway, and after another glint of light from his flashlight, started ascending an ornately carved staircase. Underfoot, the steps squeaked like starved mice.

Reaching the upper hall, he stepped down on the softness of a rug. And as further evidence that Skanlon occupied a portion of the second floor, and was at home, Boyd saw a razor-edge of light beneath a door at the rear. He moved softly toward it, and with his ear close to the door, he listened. He heard the ticking of his own watch, and far away, the honking of stray motor-horns. His gloved fingers curled round the door-knob. With his automatic held close to his chest, he burst into the room.

It was a big square room, brightly lighted. An unmade bed occupied an alcove adjoining the room. Square against a wide window, which was thickly curtained, a flat-topped desk stood. And by the desk an iron safe, square and not large. The door hung open.

But it was not the room's furnishings which grabbed Boyd's attention. It was the corpse on the floor.

In life the corpse had been a fussy, twitching little chiseler named Fritz Skanlon. Sleek black hair plastered over

THE FUN FARM MURDER

a white bald spot. Eyeglasses on a black cord—broken now. Fidgeting fingers—quiet now. Nasal voice, shifting eyes. For years he had operated in the shadowy zone separating legality from crookedness, a disgrace to the profession. Disbarred finally, he squirmed into real estate.

And from the looks of this layout, he hadn't been very successful, Boyd thought, with a trace of pity. This room had been his office and his bedroom and—yes, his kitchen too. Over against that wall a gas-plate stood, and a small table piled with unwashed dishes.

Death had ripped into him in a commonplace-enough fashion—a bullet through his ticker. Fired fairly close, from the looks of the wound. He lay on his back, his mouth open. No gun in sight.

The walls of this house, and its distance from other dwellings, would have muffled a gun's report, Boyd concluded. The neighbors would have supposed it a backfiring car. Boyd felt the man's temples and his wrist, and guessed roughly that he had died an hour ago. At about nine-fifteen.

STRAIGHTENING up, Boyd put his glove back onto his hand and stood listening intently. The night outside was windless, so no pounding shutters or shrill gale-noises corrupted the sheer silence which the house enclosed. Only the distant mutter of traffic.

He went to the safe—a cheap little safe—and scrutinized the welter of papers and documents that had tumbled out onto the floor. It looked as if Skanlon had been compelled to open the safe, so that his murderer could loot it. But what of value could a robber have expected to find in the safe of that shyster?

Rapidly but thoroughly Boyd examined those papers. Most of them were such things as long-expired fire- and auto-insurance policies—trash. But when he stood up at the end of his search, he carried to the desk several curious things.

One was a sheet of newspaper—the financial page of the *Tribune* published in Mine Valley, a prosperous city some eighty miles away. It had been folded to an advertisement in the lower right corner. This was the financial statement of the Mechanics Trust & Savings Bank of that city. The newspaper carried an early September date-line.

Then there was a fire-and-tornado insurance policy covering buildings on a piece of rural property. The forty-acre

farm was described in great technical detail; and clipped to the policy was an undated newspaper item from some unknown paper, briefly recounting that Mr. F. L. Skanlon had purchased a forty-acre farm from one August E. Schuckelutz.

But the most astonishing thing of all was a folded paper about the size and shape of an insurance policy. Boyd had discovered it in the midst of that heap on the floor, evidently overlooked by Skanlon's killer. It was a bond for a thousand dollars—a six-per-cent first mortgage bond of the Great Lakes Steel & Foundry Corporation. In these times, of course, there were good bonds and bad, but from Boyd's cursory knowledge of finance, he knew that these bonds were hovering around par.

Had there been other bonds in that safe? Very likely. But why would Skanlon entrust them to that foolish little safe? If he could afford bonds, he could afford renting a safety-deposit box. Then a nerve-tingling thought came to him—possibly the bonds had been stolen. Perhaps Skanlon had taken no chances on a court order opening a deposit-box. Perhaps this safe had been only their temporary resting-place.

Sliding the bond and the other papers into his inner pocket, he went to work on the desk. The drawers yielded an immense amount of junk, and a couple of interesting trifles. One was a receipt made out two weeks ago to F. L. Skanlon, declaring that Robert O'Brien had received the sum of two hundred dollars in part payment for the cabin boat *Nora*. The other was a roll of papers—maps—property maps of this county. Many townships were missing, but upon one sheet a piece of property had been outlined in red pencil.

BOYD jerked that insurance policy from his pocket. The description of the property coincided with the portion outlined on the map.

The bottom map was larger and more general—it depicted the whole county on a single sheet. A red pencil had marked it, too, in a way that Boyd found absorbing. For beside the river bank in the city's second ward, a tiny square had been drawn. That was this house. Boyd's forefinger followed the snaky twists of the river upstream, past Fun Farm Park, and three miles beyond. Another red square, on the river bank. That was Fritz Skanlon's recently acquired farm.

And according to that receipt, he had bought a boat. It would be possible for anyone to travel from this house to the farm without ever showing his face on a public highway. Nothing damning in that; and yet—yet—

In Boyd's thoughts, ghostly faint, a dim outline was taking shape. He began to understand a little of what lay behind the events of the evening. He suspected other things, but there were great gaps that were blank.

Going to the fireplace, he touched a match to the maps and watched them burn, wondering why Kerrigan had been slain, and why he had penciled the telephone number of the Campbell Hotel, and why a pin-ball machine should have acquired five hundred dollars' worth of importance. Those answers would have to wait: what he wanted now was that newspaper for a week ago Friday.

Returning to the desk, he picked up a pencil and poised its point above a blank appointment pad. Twisting his gloved fingers into a back-handed position, he wrote: "*Sunday. 9 p.m. Pete Blackholm.*"

THEN, his gun in his hand, he left that room and tiptoeing down the stairs, crawled through the open window. Bushes fringed the side of the house, and he sought their shadowy shelter as he moved silently toward the river. Behind the house, the lawn sloped gently downward. Reaching the river, he discerned a small rectangular structure—a boathouse. The door was unlocked; water lapped softly in the empty boat-slip.

In darkness again, he left the boathouse, but he did not retrace his steps to River Road Drive. Moving with the softness of an alley-cat, he ranged through a series of backyards till he reached a side-street. Then, walking very casually, he returned to his car and drove away.

Within the next few minutes, he visited telephone-booths in two widely separated drug-stores. In the first, he dialed police headquarters.

"This," he said, pitching his voice an exasperated octave higher than usual, "is Felix Stanton. I live at 1827 River Road Drive, and I want to lodge a complaint. There's been some shooting in our neighborhood. . . . Of course it's shooting—I know shooting when I hear it. . . . Yes. At 1823 River Road Drive—that's next door. How? A squad-car? I dunno—you'd better send two of them, for there were some rough-looking men went into that house, and then these shots—"

Boyd smiled faintly as he left the store and drove toward a more prosperous section of the city. Pete Blackholm, he imagined, would get the surprise of his life when the cops told him they had found his name penciled on Skanlon's appointment pad. Well, Blackholm possessed three essentials of a murder suspect—a tough hide, money, and important political connections.

IF he or his men hadn't shot Skanlon, they could pry themselves out of the suspect category quickly. Maybe even if they were guilty they could manage it—it wouldn't be the first murder rap Blackholm had beaten. Boyd's least worry was about Pete Blackholm's ability to take care of himself. He rather imagined that Pete had jumped to the conclusion that Skanlon was trying to muscle into his pin-ball monopoly. Pete would think that Skanlon, failing to acquire the machine peacefully from Mrs. Rasmussen, had sent his trigger men after it.

Cruising along the brilliant width of Crown Boulevard, he halted at another drug-store and called the messenger service department of a telegraph company.

"This," he announced pompously, "is J. Westcott Eddington. My address is the Maximilian Apartment Hotel. Can I get a messenger at once?"

"Certainly, Mr. Eddington."

"Very well. I have been out of town for two weeks, and a most exasperating thing has occurred. I left explicit instructions with the desk clerk that every day he should save a copy of the *Morning Chronicle* for me. But now I find that due to some gross inefficiency he neglected to save the issue for a week ago last Friday. I want a messenger to go to the *Chronicle* office, procure a copy of that issue, and bring it to Hotel Maximilian."

"Certainly, sir. Right away."

"And—um-m-m. Will you tell the messenger to meet me in the lobby? I'll be watching for him. Mrs. Eddington is very weary after traveling all day, and it would—um-m-m—disturb her to have the boy rapping on our door."

"Yes, Mr. Eddington. I'll make a note of that. You'll be in the lobby, sir."

Returning to his car, he cruised along the finest section of Crown Boulevard. Presently he glimpsed the Maximilian Hotel, a half-block ahead. A big, luxurious structure, its flood-lighted façade stood some distance back from the street on a level lawn. Instead of curving in

and coasting up to its striped marquee, he drove on for a couple of blocks, turned off on a side-street, and then circled back toward the Maximilian on a thoroughfare which ran behind it. Drifting along slowly, he discerned an alley, turned in. This took him to a paved court behind the hotel.

He paused among the cars parked there; but instead of switching off the motor, he pulled the gear lever and drove down the alley again, parking on the street. He did not lock the car door, but stood for a second staring at the deserted street, an odd premonition of danger touching him.

As he strode into the shadowy deeps of the alley, an unnerving sense of walking straight into a trap came over him. Nonsense! No one but the messenger clerk knew he was coming here, and the clerk thought his name was J. Westcott Eddington. But if by this time Tubby Gunderson had freed himself and babbled that Boyd had slain Kerrigan, the papers and radios might be spreading the news. In the Maximilian lobby he might be recognized.

Well, that was simply part of the game; you couldn't get caught in a murder tangle without danger. He'd be in a lot more danger if he didn't present a solution of Kerrigan's murder to the State cops.

EMERGING into the brightly-lighted parking-space, he lit a cigarette and strode almost jauntily along the drive which took him around to the front. He walked boldly toward the twin boxwood plants guarding the marquee, fighting down an impulse to glance over his shoulder. A uniformed doorman touched his cap; the door glittered open; and feeling like a rabbit hopping into a box-trap, Boyd entered the lobby.

This was not large, but painfully genteel. Two silver-haired ladies sat by a marble pillar, discussing each other's expensive gowns with the most exquisitely refined cattiness. In a deep chair a bald and dinner-jacketed tycoon dozed over a half-smoked cigar. The desk-clerk, a frosty old silver fox, adjusted his nose-glasses and favored Boyd with a cold, searching stare. Boyd found a secluded chair with a view of the door, and settled down to wait.

Nothing happened. Nobody entered or left. The ladies talked on. The tycoon dozed on. Boyd's cigarette burned back to his fingers, and he arose and



pushed the stub into a floor-urn full of sand. The desk-clerk watched severely. Boyd sat down again, his nerves tightening. He could almost smell danger hanging like a rank odor in the motionless lobby. . . . Nerves, nerves.

He glanced around the place. At the end of the lobby elevators stood waiting, and a flight of marble steps led downward. A sign, unlighted now, said, "*To the Venetian Room.*"

Minutes passed.

Where was that messenger-boy? Boyd stared at the front doors; they didn't move. He had an urgent impulse to jump up and leave, but he wanted that newspaper. It would, he was certain, fill in a lot of the puzzle's missing jigsaws.

He stood up and stretched his legs about the lobby, trying to move easily—not to pace. The desk-clerk glared, his mouth a long, tight slit, his fingers drumming silently. If looks could kill, Boyd would have dropped dead. What did the old boy have against him, anyway?

He circled past the elevators and paused for a moment to glance down the steps "*To the Venetian Room.*" He could see a small foyer where a colored porter was wringing out a mop. A glass door stood ajar, leading into the dark dining-room. He walked on, moving closer to the clerk's desk. As he approached, the clerk's fingers tapped faster and his lips parted and then came together tighter. Behind his flashing glasses, his eyes narrowed, and fear cowered in his irises. He stepped backward. What in thunder was wrong with him?

Then Boyd's sharp glance beheld something on the desk that glued him in his tracks. It was a small stack of the early edition *Morning Chronicle*, with his name in black letters, and his picture, and Tubby Gunderson's name and Mike Kerrigan's—

His blood-pressure shot skyward like a gusher, and his nerve-network yanked itself to such a quivering tightness that he wanted to yell off steam at the top of his voice. His fists were clenched. The man behind the desk kept backing painfully away, and suddenly he turned and scurried into some inner office. The black letters seemed to blur and run together fluidly.

THEN Cliff Boyd seemed to tap some reservoir of new energy; everything snapped clear, and he was very calm but highly alert. The desk-clerk had recognized him right at first—either from his picture or possibly from some campaign meeting. And probably the fellow had immediately phoned the cops.

Briskly, Boyd strode to the door; and as he left the lobby, he saw a messenger-boy swinging off his bicycle. His hand darted into his pocket and jerked out a dollar. The boy was carrying a folded newspaper.

"You're looking for Mr. Eddington?"
"Yes sir."

Boyd grabbed the paper, stuffed the bill into the boy's hand. "Keep the change," he said, starting along the driveway.

Then he pivoted—for, skimming in from the street, he glimpsed a car with an official license. Carrying plain-clothes men.

He ducked under the marquee.

"Hoodlums," he barked at the doorman as he whizzed past. "Kidnapers. Hold the door!"

He galloped through the startled lobby and pitched down the marble steps, hoping the doorman might detain those dicks for a precious second or two. To the colored porter in the foyer he yipped:

"It's a hold-up. Beat it."

"Eee-yeel!" the porter exclaimed, flinging high his mop, and scrambling after Boyd into the dark Venetian Room.

His flashlight beam blazed on swinging doors to the kitchen; he plunged through, the porter trying to pass him.

"Flat on the floor!" Boyd ordered. "They won't shoot you then."

And while the porter dropped, Boyd snatched open another door and jumped into the corridor beyond. His thoughts

were speeding faster than light; and when he saw a freight elevator, he darted inside, yanked shut the door and pulled the lever to go up.

Floor-levels dropped past—slowly, too slowly. Split seconds counted now; and maybe those dicks would stumble over the porter, and grapple him in the dark.

Halting the elevator at *Four*, he jumped out. Far below, he thought he heard shouts, and a woman's scream, and dim confusion. He raced along the corridor. In a minute this place would be alive with people. Rounding a corner, he saw a red bulb glowing above a fire-escape door.

He pushed open the door to the grated platform and darted down toward the lighted parking court behind the hotel. He saw that the fire-escape ran clear to the ground without a weighted ladder.

Instantly, he rushed down the steps to the paved court below. As he ran toward his car, men started yelling far up on the fire-escape. Boyd didn't stop to hear what they said. Knees pumping high, he plunged into the black alley and galloped through the sound of wild gunshots to his car.

He flung himself inside and tramped the starter and whirled like mad from the curb. He squealed round a corner, drove two blocks, scooted round another corner. For the next fifteen minutes he continued that, losing pursuit, till at last his car purred through an outlying district and passed the city limits.

He drove several miles into the country and halted on a dark side-road. Then he took the folded newspaper from his pocket—the *Chronicle* for a week ago Friday—and began to read.

WHAT he read was a feature story—a color story painting the background of a news-event that was cooling. The story had broken a week ago Tuesday. At noon on that day two bandits had entered the Mechanics Trust & Savings Bank in Mine Valley, while a confederate waited in a car.

The bandits wore no masks. They were cool, efficient, very successful. They spoke in low voices. Their hands did not tremble. They knew their business.

"The most daring daylight robbery in recent years," said the *Chronicle*.

Their haul was large. Currency amounting to some fourteen thousand dollars had passed into their hands, and an assortment of industrial bonds amounting to thirty-three thousand dollars. The

THE FUN FARM MURDER

bank had no record of the serial numbers of the currency, but the bonds were registered. Honest citizens were urged to exercise caution in buying bonds—the paper was publishing a list of the bonds stolen. Brokers and bankers, it said, would do well to clip the list and keep it. The bonds might not appear for months, years.

From the robbery, a casualty resulted. Not a gun-wound, but a traffic accident. As the bandits' car whizzed away from the bank, it failed to abide by a red light at Seventh and Elmwood Streets. Mr. Samuel J. Pennyworth, 79, a retired merchant, had been tapping across the street under the protection of a green light. The bandits' car had speeded at fifty across that intersection. . . . Mr. Pennyworth's funeral had been well attended.

SEVERAL officials had chased the bandits' car, but the get-away had evidently been expertly charted. Car and bandits vanished. Then, the day after the hold-up, the car was found, by an urchin, Billy Robeson, 11, who dwelt in the village of Greenfield, a dozen miles from Mine Valley. Billy had been gathering walnuts in the timber of the Michael Mahoney farm. The timber bordered the Fox River—that same river which meandered across the State to flow past Fun Farm Park.

Billy had observed the top of a sedan protruding from the river. From the water's edge, tire-marks led across a sandy beach to a dim trail wandering through the timber to a country turnpike. Billy ran to the Mahoney farmhouse. Sometime later, men and horses had pulled the streaming car from the river. It bore California license plates, probably stolen—the same license plates that witnesses had observed on the get-away car. Authorities surmised that the bandits had climbed into another car, waiting in the Mahoney timber, for the second stage of their get-away.

Several hold-up witnesses had gazed upon hundreds of photographs in Mill Valley police headquarters, and the bandits had been identified. The *Chronicle* printed their pictures, with a biography of each.

Max Hubbard: Alias Max Harrington, alias Mark Hoffman, the car's driver. High cheekbones, sunken cheeks. Alumnus of a reform school and a couple of prisons.

Melvin Worrall: Pudgy—brown hair and freckles. His career had begun in

small-time rackets; he had done a stretch in Michigan once for carrying concealed weapons.

The third man's name was Ralph Ott, although he had enough aliases to populate a town: Police considered him the spark-plug of the trio, and by all odds the toughest. They said he was daring, brutal, cold—a born killer. He had Indian-black hair, smoldering eyes, a surly mouth.

At thirteen, he had been sent to reform school on a cruelty-to-animals charge. At seventeen he escaped and started sticking up filling-stations and drug-stores. Then to a reformatory for three years and eight months. After that he dropped from sight for a couple of years; but in 1934, after a series of bank robberies, he was given a life sentence in the Boxwood State prison. Fourteen months ago he escaped.

Shortly thereafter, in a half dozen States, bank tellers spent nearly as much time lying face-down as standing upright. A swift strike, a good haul, a clean get-away—all the robberies had that in common. And most witnesses had identified Hubbard and Worrall and Ott as the mugs on the business end of the guns. Some of the witnesses hadn't been able to identify the bandits, because they were dead witnesses.

Little was known about the habits of Worrall and Hubbard; but Ott, it seemed, shared an enthusiasm with several million other Americans—he loved football. To watch a game, he would take very great risks indeed—last autumn he had been identified, just too late, at several stadiums. After he escaped from Boxwood prison, the warden had ruefully opined that Ott broke out because of the football season. Police departments in college towns were urged to station detectives at all gates, to scrutinize fans for a man with Indian-black hair and a mean mouth.

AS he devoured that feature story, Boyd's blood coursed faster. He followed the print to an inner page, where, in a box, were listed the stolen bonds.

Among them was a block of six percent Great Lakes Steel & Foundry Corporation bonds. From his pocket he drew the bond he had found at Fritz Skanlon's. Its serial number was K-9269. One of the stolen bonds bore that number.

He dropped the newspaper, switched off the dash-light, wheeled around his



The desk-clerk had recognized him . . . and had phoned the cops.

car and sped back toward the city. He knew now why Mike Kerrigan had been slain. And in his brain a plan formed—daring, dangerous.

He hated to risk another drug-store, but he had to get an address. He stopped outside a suburban pharmacy, and before entering, he fished a pair of sun glasses from a door-pocket and hooked them on. Their amber lenses weren't much of a disguise, but they'd serve.

No phone-book had ever been used faster than Boyd handled that one. Making a bee-line for the booth, he grabbed it, found the address of Kenneth A. Richards, dropped the book and strode out. Ten minutes later he was climbing the bungalow steps at that address and thumbing the doorbell. In law-school he had known Richards slightly; the man was now an assistant on the attorney-general's staff.

The house was dark; he pushed the bell-button again, for a long time. Deep in the house a light came on, followed a minute later by the porch light. The door opened on a lean young man with a slim mustache and keen eyes. When he saw Cliff Boyd, he stepped back.

"Wait!" Boyd commanded. "I know what you're thinking, Richards, but you're wrong. And just to show my good faith—here."

Boyd brought out his automatic, turned the muzzle toward himself, extended the weapon.

"Keep me covered if you want to. I've got some things to tell you that will curl your hair. I don't know what you've heard about me tonight, but whatever it was, it probably wasn't true."

Richards started to take the gun, then let his hand fall beside his dressing-gown. He smiled a little.

"I don't believe that will be necessary," he said. "Put it away, Boyd." And in the living-room he said, "Sit down. Have you seen this?" From the table he took up that early edition of tomorrow's *Chronicle*. "Mrs. Richards and I were out this evening—I bought this on the way home."

"When you read that—did you believe I killed Kerrigan?"

Richards, always a cool, self-possessed individual, touched his mustache.

"I'm a very skeptical person," he said. "I simply withheld judgment. What's on your mind?"

"Does the name of Ralph Ott mean anything to you?"

It pierced his self-possession. "Ott!" he exclaimed. "The chap who led that Mine Valley hold-up?"

"I know where he is," Boyd said. "He and Hubbard and Worrall. Ott killed Mike Kerrigan. I'm sure of it. And he took Sally Kerrigan away with him. Maybe as a hostage—I don't know. And he might have killed Fritz Skanlon—although I think Pete Blackholm had a finger in that."

"Skanlon! Is he—"

SO Cliff Boyd swiftly related the evening's events, commenting finally:

"I think Skanlon was the brains of that Mine Valley job. He'd been disbarred, and was probably desperate. As a lawyer, he'd had underworld contacts. He bought that town house on the river, and he bought that country place upstream. And a boat."

"You mean—"

"I mean that those mugs made the longest lap of their get-away by boat. They drove from Mine Valley to the river and drowned their car. I think Skanlon was waiting for them with his boat. The highways were hot, but no one thought to look for them on the river. So they just chugged downstream and holed in at Skanlon's new country place.

"I think Skanlon took his share of the swag mostly in bonds. He'd hold them till things quieted down, and then sell them through fences."

Richards smoothed his mustache. "But why would Ott want to kill Kerrigan? And that slot-machine—"

"I'm coming to that: Notice what the *Chronicle* said about Ott's habits? He's nutty about football. He's been holed in since a week ago Tuesday. And this is the football season. Get it?"

"Well—"

"Think of a mug like Ott—a man of action. Think how restless he must get cooped up in the country. Two Saturdays have gone by—with their big games. I'll bet the guy wanted to risk arrest and go to some game. Skanlon probably vetoed that, and it left Ott surly. So Skanlon got an idea—Ott couldn't go to football, but he'd bring football to Ott.

"See? That pin-ball machine was an imitation football-game. Skanlon had likely seen it in the Golden Nugget, and he told Ott he'd buy it for him. Those pin-ball games are fun, and that would keep Ott amused. By today Ott was probably like a stir-crazy man—cooped in out there.

"Skanlon tried to buy the machine. Mrs. Rasmussen wouldn't sell. Blackholm was out of town, and none of his muscle-men would dare sell a machine without his say-so. Skanlon likely told Ott to take it easy—he'd get the machine for him in a day or two.

"I'll bet Ott was plenty sore. Like a spoiled brat! He had his mouth made up for that machine, and he wanted it right away. So, after Skanlon drove back to town, Ott decided to go to the Golden Nugget and force Mrs. Rasmussen to sell. He wanted the machine, and he wanted action. He's always been reckless, and there wasn't much chance that he'd be recognized at the Golden Nugget.

HE knew Mrs. Rasmussen wouldn't report to the police, because it was hardly a hold-up; and in the second place, those games are against the law. She wouldn't report a gambling device had been stolen.

"So Ott went to the Golden Nugget—probably in a car they'd stolen and stored at Skanlon's farm even before the Mine Valley job. They got the machine. Mrs. Rasmussen didn't report it to the police—she reported it to Blackholm's headquarters.

"When Blackholm got back to town and heard about it, he must have been burned up. It would look to him as if Skanlon were trying to bust up his racket.

As if Skanlon had imported some gunmen to muss up Blackholm's organization.

"He couldn't have that. So with one or two of his own gunmen he went to Skanlon's place and rubbed him out. But first he made Skanlon open his safe, so it would look as if Skanlon had been killed by a robber. Blackholm must have been plenty surprised to find those bonds and probably some currency in that safe. That was just velvet. He took it and killed Skanlon. But one of the bonds was mixed up with insurance policies and other papers and they overlooked it. See?"

Richards said: "Yes, but—but Mike Kerrigan: Gunderson tried to arrest you for that, and you knocked him out. It looks to me as if you've cracked that bank case, and maybe the murder of Skanlon—but you haven't done yourself any good as to Kerrigan's death."

BOYD held out the *Chronicle*—pointed to Ott's picture and the paragraph which said he'd been confined in Boxwood State prison from 1934 till his escape.

"See that? Mike Kerrigan hadn't always been a watchman at Fun Farm Park. He took that job in 1937. Before that, he was a guard at the Boxwood prison. Does that change your mind?"

Richards smiled. "You're not so dumb, Boyd. You might make a good sheriff."

"Ott risked not being recognized at the Golden Nugget—but he was," Boyd said. "By Kerrigan. No wonder Mike beat it out of there. No wonder he stopped at the filling-station and yelled to the attendant that he should tell Gunderson to come to the park as soon as he got in."

"Why didn't he stop there and phone the State police?"

"He was probably being followed close, and he knew it. He'd read the papers—he knew Ott was suspected in the Mine Valley holdup. Mike was unarmed, and he knew that Ott would shoot him if he caught him phoning.

"So he just shouted that message and drove on. Maybe he tried to lose Ott by driving to the park the long way around. He didn't know that Mrs. Rasmussen had given away the fact that he worked in the park.

"It looks to me as if Ott got to the park before Mike. Maybe they hid their car and knocked at the bungalow. Sally was there, and she'd let them in. The

phone was dead, so probably they cut the wire before they entered the bungalow.

"I think they must have told her they were old friends of Mike. But she's a smart girl, and maybe their faces looked familiar. Maybe she had a vague memory of this newspaper story. So she made an excuse to get to the kitchen and rustled through the stack of papers and found this story and tore it out.

"By the time Mike got home, he likely thought he'd lost Ott. He must have come tearing into the house to use the phone—and ran smack into those three mugs. They killed him."

"Gunmen like Ott," Richards said, "would use a gun. But Kerrigan's skull was bashed—"

"Just the point. Gunmen *would* usually use a gun. But Ott's no fool. Kerrigan had recognized him and Ott knew he had to kill him before he spread the word that he was still on the loose in this part of the country. Ott planned it to look like anything but a gunman's job. Maybe those rocks outside the Golden Nugget gave him the idea. He grabbed one up, and later used it on Mike.

"That way, it would look as if Mike had been killed in an argument with some friend. Or maybe one reason Ott kidnaped Sally was so it would look as if she had done it, and run away."

"You think she's with those gunmen now?"

Boyd's face went bleak; his jaw tightened. "If she's still alive. . . . That's why I'm going to Skanlon's country place."

Richards said: "That's suicide. Listen, Boyd: Our office gives orders to the Bureau of Investigation, and they have authority over the State police. We'd better surround that place—blast them out—"

BOYD murmured: "I had the same idea. Except—I'll go there first—alone."

"But—"

"Because," he added, "if Sally's there—and your men fill that place with tear-gas—she'll come running out too. And she's just as likely to get machine-gunned as Ott."

Richards frowned. "That's an angle, all right. But there's no other way. If you go blundering in there, they'll shoot you full of holes—and we'll be just where we are now, except you'll be dead."

"Just the same," Boyd said, "I'm going. Besides, I've a plan—"

And after he had finished talking, Richards said: "Now I'm sure you'd make a good sheriff—if you're still alive."

He drove north from the city on the same road he had traveled early that evening on his way to Fun Farm Park, but everything was different now. The half-moon had long since vanished in the west, and the sky was dark. Like his thoughts. And this time he did not swing in at the park. He crossed the bridge spanning the river, and a half-mile beyond he turned to follow a back road that wandered among the hills bordering the east bank of the river.

Two miles—three. According to that real-estate map he had found at Skanlon's, the farm stretched from this road to the river. His car climbed a steep hill, and a little beyond the summit he glimpsed a rural mailbox perched on a post. By the roadside he parked and darkened his car.

HE saw no house—only a rutted driveway leading in to a mass of trees and brush. He brought his flashlight close to the mailbox and momentarily thumbed the button. Faded letters said, "*Schuckelutz*."

That name sent a tingle to the ends of his hair. He remembered the clipping he had found at Skanlon's, recounting that man's purchase of a farm from August E. Schuckelutz.

He gazed back along the road he had come. Soon, if everything worked out according to plan, cars loaded with State agents and State cops would come sneaking along that road, and his parked car would tell them to halt.

He touched the folded newspaper in his pocket, took a long breath, and ventured along the drive. That newspaper was part of his plan. It was the issue of tomorrow's *Chronicle* which Richards had bought—the paper whose headlines blasted forth Gunderson's accusations.

He groped slowly, feeling his way along the drive like a blind man. Except for weak rays from the stars it was pitch black, and he didn't dare risk his flashlight. The underbrush which fringed those ruts kept stabbing his face; the land seemed to be overrun with low-branched trees and bushes. He concluded that this was one of those impoverished hill farms, gashed by gullies, that defied cultivation.

Beneath his cautious tread the trail curved and descended, crossing the planks of a small bridge. Boyd stopped.

THE FUN FARM MURDER

He was standing at the bottom of a glen. Around him the land rose sharply, black against the stars. Somewhere dead leaves whispered of a rabbit's passage; the icy cry of an owl knifed the desolate silence.

An involuntary shiver streaked his spine; and suddenly doubts assailed him. Where were the farmhouse, the farm buildings? This trail was getting him nowhere fast. Had his calculations missed fire somewhere?

He remembered that cigarette stub with the letter "R". Perhaps Rasmussen had killed Mike, and Mrs. Rasmussen had told a pack of lies. And why had Mike penciled the phone number of Hotel Campbell on that campaign card? Should he have explored those leads more thoroughly?

And yet—he had found Skanlon dead with a stolen bond by his body. The trail had looked plain, but it seemed to have led him into a black pocket of the night. Soon the State agents and State cops would be swarming through these woods; he'd have some fancy explaining to do—from a cell—if their search yielded only timber rabbits.

THEN his memory tossed up a bit of history, and he fumbled on—over the bridge, up the hillside. For he recalled that a century ago the early settlers came to this part of the State not by land but by water. Up the river. The river was their road, and they built near the river.

His pulse leaped as he reached the summit. Several rods ahead the trail spread out into a clearing. He paused at its edge. He saw a barn, sheds. And a house.

Even in the dim starlight it looked ramshackle. It stood staring bleakly out over the river valley. The drawn shades of a downstairs room were faintly rosy with light.

Quickly he circled the clearing, toward the river, giving the house wide berth. Tall weeds rattled about his waist as he moved over the rounded crest of the bluff and descended. Presently soft river-sand cushioned his feet, and he crept along toward the black bulk of a boathouse. Inside, he risked his flashlight for a second. Snug in the slip a cabin boat lay moored, the *Nora*.

He stepped aboard, and for the next minute his fingers were ravaging the motor. An hour's tinkering would be required to make it even sputter.

Outside again, he slid into the bluff-shadows, searching for a path leading up

to the house. He found a cleft in the bluff, with stepping-stones. It was like an ascending tunnel, except it lacked a roof. It climbed to a basement door on the north side of the house.

SOFTLY he tried the door; it swung inward, unlocked.

He hesitated. The boathouse door had been unlocked—and now this one! For a moment he didn't like that at all. Then suddenly he understood. This was a get-away—this basement door, the deep-set path to the river. Ott wasn't taking chances on losing precious seconds by fumbling with locks. He must have figured that any possible pursuit would come from the road, not the river, and that if the cops ever did find him here they would expect him to try getting away by motorcar, not by boat.

Boyd entered the basement and began climbing the stair. Then hell broke loose.

For as soon as his weight pressed down the first step, a loud bell began clanging upstairs. The devil! They must have wired up an alarm system!

He almost turned to run, but that would be folly. Instead, at the top of his voice, he started bawling:

"Boys, I'm a friend. Fritz Skanlon sent me. Important message! Skanlon sent me! Skanlon sent—"

The alarm bell quit clanging. For sixty seconds nothing happened. Motionless on the steps, Boyd kept his gaze riveted upward, expecting to see the darkness cracked by an opening door at the top. He kept shouting intermittently. Yelling about Skanlon, an important message. That might rouse their curiosity enough to detain their bullets.

Then light knifed the darkness. Basement electricity. And a man's voice from the door behind him growled:

"Shut up. Put up your hands."

Boyd put up his hands. Without turning, he said:

"Fritz Skanlon sent me out here with a message—"

"I heard you the first time. Keep your trap shut." And then the man called: "Okay—he's covered."

That opened a door at the top of the stairs. Gazing down at him, Boyd saw two steady eyes brooding in a dark countenance. The man had Indian-black hair; his chin was pulled in against his chest; and he held a gun. For a moment the silence was positively deadly; then the man snarled:



Alias: Max Hubbard, Melvin Worrall and Ralph Ott; real names unknown.

"Come on up. If you make a funny move, I'll kill you."

Hands elevated, Boyd climbed the stair. As he reached the kitchen, Ott backed slowly into the room. At his side another armed man stood—a fat young man with brown hair and freckles.

When the fellow who had covered him from behind came into sight, Boyd noted his high cheekbones, his sallow, corpse-like complexion. Holding his gun on Boyd, he backed through a door into the front part of the house.

"In there," Ott said.

Entering the living-room, Boyd swept it in a quick glance for Sally, but she was not there. Nothing much was there. On the uncarpeted floor, littered with cigarette butts, only a few pieces of furniture stood. But against the wall a football game was in progress, beneath the glass cover of a pin-ball machine. The lock had been broken open, so the coin-trip could be operated without benefit of nickels.

Ott patted Boyd's pockets, bringing out his automatic and that folded copy of Monday morning's *Chronicle*. As the paper unrippled in his fingers, he gaped at the black headlines. His eyes devoured the print; he stared at Boyd's picture, then at Boyd. Then a tiny grin twitched his mouth.

"Sit down," he commanded. And he added: "So you were runnin' for sheriff. Going to fight the big bad bandits! And then you busted in on a croaking. A fall-guy—a perfect fall-guy. That's rich."

He dropped the paper, and with cold contempt surveyed Boyd. The room was deathly still. Then Ott said:

"All right. Talk."

"I'm a friend of Fritz Skanlon. Does that **mean** anything to you?"

"Don't ask questions, punk. Talk!"

"I got in a jam tonight," Boyd said. "It's all in that paper. I went out to Fun Farm Park to see a guy about lining up votes, and he was dead. A deputy sheriff came and tried to arrest me. I got away. He got loose and reported me, and after that the town was hot."

"You mean," Ott asked with utter contempt, "that you beat up this deputy and tied him without bumping him off?"

Boyd nodded.

Ott sighed, swore. "Some guys were born dumb," he said.

"I know Skanlon," Boyd said. "We've been good friends for years. In fact," he added confidentially, "he's been backing me in my run for sheriff. If this mess hadn't come up, I might have been elected. And we could have cleaned up, Skanlon and I."

"Skanlon never mentioned any of that to me."

"He never mentioned you to me, either—till tonight. Skanlon's got lots of irons in the fire. He don't mix 'em."

A slight change had come over Ott; some of his hostility had evaporated.

"Talk some more," he said. "I like the sound of your voice."

"Well, when I got in this jam, I went to Skanlon's place on River Road Drive. I had to croak a guy there."

"You—"

"A guy," Boyd said, "by the name of Pete Blackholm. Ever heard of him?"

Ott sneered. "Small-timer. Chicken-feed racketeer."

"He **can** shoot, anyway," Boyd said. "Or could. He was just about to plug Skanlon when I got there. Well, he didn't. I plugged Blackholm."

"Why'd he want to plug Skanlon?"

Boyd pointed to the pin-ball machine.

"You guys took that machine. Skanlon had tried to buy it first. Blackholm

thought Skanlon had imported you guys to bust up his racket."

A short, barking laugh rasped from Ott's mouth.

"Skanlon's left town for a few days," Boyd said. "Till Blackholm's pals cool off. And he sent me out here to lay low myself, and to tell you he's out of town."

For a minute Ott was silent. His gaze was fixed on the point where Boyd's nose met his forehead. At last he said:

"How do we know you aint a liar?"

"Skanlon gave me credentials."

"Gave you what?"

"He gave me something so you'd know I was on the up and up."

"A note?"

"He's not that dumb. If the cops had picked me up on the way here and had found a note Skanlon had written to you—"

"I get it," Ott said. "What did he give you?"

Boyd's hand started for his inner pocket.

"Wait!" Ott's command cracked like a lash. "I'll do the fishing," he said.

HIS hand slipped into Boyd's pocket, and he brought out that bond of the Great Lakes Steel & Foundry Corporation.

"See?" Boyd said. "He told me you'd know where that came from."

Ott's gaze left the bond and rested on Boyd for a long time. Then, as if a decision had been reached, he pocketed his gun. To his companions he said:

"Okay. I don't much like having this goop around, but if Skanlon says so—"

"How about my gun?" Boyd asked.

"It's safe where it is—right here with me. Now," he said, pacing to the pin-ball machine, "I've got a game to finish. Then I've got another game to start—and it aint football."

Hubbard and Worrall mirrored Ott's smirk. It was all Boyd could do to keep from leaping up and crashing his fist into Ott's jaw. Instead, carelessly, he asked:

"What's that?"

"There's a jane here," Ott said.

"A jane? Skanlon told me you guys were here alone."

"We were. But I picked her up to-night, and I'm giving her a chance to think things over. I never force my attentions on a jane. Unless," he added, smirking, "I have to."

He pulled back the pin-ball lever and snapped it; a marble went scooting up the incline. A faint *ping* came from the

machine's innards as the marble scored. Snapping the lever again, Ott hung greedily over the glass, fairly drinking up the game's progress. Then no more marbles were left; Ott swore.

"I've been trying all night to win three games," he muttered. "Three games—then I go upstairs. I've beat the machine twice—"

He thumbed the coin-trip, snapped the lever for a new game.

The fat young man said: "I wouldn't worry about no football game if I had a jane waiting."

Ott jerked his gaze up from the machine and glared at the speaker. His countenance was bitterly unsmiling, and you fancied there were coiled springs in his lean body, like a rattlesnake poised to strike. Suddenly he snarled:

"Who's running this, you or me?"

The young man swallowed.

"Don't get sore," he gulped. "I didn't mean nothing."

"When I want advice, I'll call for it," Ott shrieked. Anger congested his face and throbbing forehead, and his words split the air like yells in a madhouse. Muttering profanely, he returned his surly attention to the game.

It went badly, and again he thumbed the coin-trip. Cliff Boyd sneaked a glance at his watch. By this time the timber outside should be a-rustle with State police, and officers should be ambushed around the boathouse.

He said: "This place is safe, isn't it?"

"Safe—what do you mean?"

Life and death dangled in the balance from Boyd's next words, and he knew it. A high-strung trigger-man like Ott might whip out a gun and shoot him before he finishing speaking.

"When I was leaving town," he said, "a couple of State cops got on my tail. I gave them the run-around, and I think I lost them."

Ott's hand was just lifting to snap the pin-machine lever; it came to a stop in mid-air. He turned full on Boyd. The thin flanges of his nostrils were dilating and contracting, and his mouth twitched. But he only said in a deadly cold voice:

"You *think* you lost them. You only think—"

Nonchalantly, Boyd said: "Pretty sure of it. When I came up the side-road there was a pair of headlights about a mile behind me. Doubt if they were cops, but if they were, I sure fooled them."

I left my car out on the road and came in here on foot."

The silence was nerve-splittingly painful. Ott stood perfectly motionless. His face gashed by its cruel mouth was a frozen mask of corruption.

"You—" he exclaimed at last, calling Boyd a string of foul names. "Oh," he groaned, "you idiot! I'm going to—"

And his hand started for his pocket.

"What's the matter?" Boyd asked innocently. "Even if those cops trail me here, they don't know you're here. If you boys are afraid, why don't you leave?"

"We're going to. But first I'm going to plug you, and I'm going upstairs and plug the dame. She knows too much—"

"Gosh," Boyd said, playing it dumb, "don't hold anything against me. If you leave me and the dame dead, the cops will know somebody else was here."

Ott paused indecisively.

"He's right, Ott," the high-cheek-boned man broke in. "Let's beat it and leave him here. He'll keep the cops busy and that'll cover our get-away."

Ott whirled, snarling. "I'm running this. I'll decide what to do—"

BUT then an interruption took place. From the hall, heavy noises thudded—somebody kicking the front door.

"Boyd!" a man outside shouted. "The game's up. We trailed you, and we know you're in there."

Hubbard, Worrall, Ott—they were frozen motionless, like wax figures in a carnival chamber of murderers.

"Boyd! Better come out with your hands up. We'll give you five minutes. Then we'll fill that place with tear-gas, and when you come out, we'll shoot."

Ott's lips writhed, and from the side of his mouth he snapped to his companions:

"Beat it to the boat. We'll leave this guy—"

"Aint you comin'?"

"Minute. I gotta go upstairs. Dead dames can't testify—"

Hubbard and Worrall glided toward the kitchen. Ott swung his gun on Boyd.

"You aint going out till I'm in the clear. Get on upstairs. Snap it!"

With hands aloft, Boyd hopped into the hall and took the steps two at a time. In the black upper corridor Ott snapped a switch.

"That door," he said.

It was a tall door, and when Boyd slammed it open, the light from the hall

shafted into what appeared to be an empty bedroom. But when Ott snapped another switch Boyd saw Sally.

A cry rose in his throat. For she was standing on tiptoe, her arms strained above her head. Two ropes ascended tautly from her wrists. The ends were tied around a two-by-four that lay across a square opening in the ceiling.

Her mouth was gagged, her face pain-stamped, her eyes swollen from weeping. They widened when she saw Boyd.

A tempest of rage shook him.

Ott stepped toward her, clutching not his own gun, but Boyd's. Then Boyd understood. Ott was going to kill them both, and leave the gun in Boyd's dead fingers.

"Hate to do it, baby," Ott said. "You and me could have got along swell."

Boyd tensed.

But just then, out in the night, rapid sounds popped from the direction of the boathouse. Shots.

Ott flung up his head, listening.

And Boyd attacked.

Viciously. Dark thoughts of Mike Kerrigan and Sally drove him cursing at Ott. That man danced back, swinging round his gun. But with the speed of a descending guillotine-blade Boyd's left hand slashed down, palm open. His hand-edge whacked Ott's wrist.

The gun roared. Bullet-loosened plaster spattered from the wall. Boyd's fingers clamped Ott's gun-wrist and twisted it violently. The automatic smacked the floor.

Snarling like a tom-cat, Ott hurled his left fist into Boyd's lips. It jarred him a little and brought blood to his mouth; his right fist shot out toward Ott's jaw. But the fellow was fast and tricky. He jerked in his chin. Boyd's fist smashed his nose and knocked him over against the wall. He fell to his knees, blood running from his nostrils.

AS Ott scrambled up, his hand went to his pocket and started withdrawing his gun. Before the weapon could flash from his pocket Boyd plunged and clamped his wrist. Instantly, Ott's head darted down. His sharp teeth sank like a rat's into the back of Boyd's hand. Boyd batted the man's ear with his free left hand.

He yelped. The gun spurted from both their grasps and clattered to the floor, slithering across the room. Then Boyd sensed rather than saw Ott's knee soaring in the foulest kind of rough-house blow.

THE FUN FARM MURDER

He jumped back and delivered a fast kick to Ott's shin.

Squealing, the man made as if to dart along the wall to the right, but when Boyd plunged to stop him, he suddenly whirled and dashed for the door.

Scooping up Ott's gun, Boyd fired, but already the doorway was empty. He jumped after him into the hall.

Downstairs somebody was yelling, "Stop or I'll—"

A gun barked, then barked again.

Boyd reached the stairs in time to see Ott pitch headlong and go tumbling down the steps, collapsing at the feet of the State agent. He didn't move again.

The State agent put away his gun.

"Our boys got the other two down by the boathouse," he said.

SALLY had never been like this before. Always she had been blithe—but now even after Cliff Boyd carried her downstairs shudders kept chasing themselves over her body.

"I hate hysterical women," she said. "And now I'm one. Isn't that foul, Cliff? I'm—"

"Easy," he said.

Cops kept milling into the room; it was like a policemen's ball. Then, still cool and crisp, Kenneth Richards appeared.

"Hubbard's dead," he said. "But our men just wounded Worrall down at the boathouse. He's talked. You were right, Boyd. Skanlon met them with his boat after that Mill Valley holdup. And he says Ott killed Kerrigan with a rock while he and Hubbard held guns—"

"Not now," Boyd snapped, indicating Sally.

She lifted her face from his lapel and stood very straight.

"Yes," she said, "now. I hate hysterical women, and I simply won't be one. I saw it all," she said slowly, fighting for self-control. "They came to the bungalow. Then Uncle Mike came. Ott killed him. Then they took me with them."

"Did this Ott—molest you?" Richards asked.

"He told me he was crazy about me. He said I was his kind of a girl. I didn't think it was a compliment. He wanted me to be his girl. He said he was a great man and that he'd never be caught. He said he'd give me diamonds. He tried to kiss me, and I did something that wasn't very ladylike: I spit in his face.

"That made him so mad that he had them tie me up. He called it giving me a chance to think things over and become sensible. That was all that happened."

Boyd said, "There're two things that I don't get, yet. At the bungalow I found a foreign cigarette stub, marked 'R', in a fern-pot. It was like those cigarettes the Rasmussen woman had—"

"Claude Rasmussen?" Sally asked. "I think I can explain that. Rasmussen and Uncle Mike were friends. He dropped in at the park a few days ago to visit with Uncle Mike. I noticed he was smoking a long, odd cigarette. He must have snuffed it out in that fern-pot instead of in an ash-tray."

"Check," Boyd said. "And now maybe you can explain why Mike had written the telephone number of Hotel Campbell on this campaign card."

"Hotel Campbell?" Sally shook her head. "I don't see why—"

"What's the number?" Richards asked.

"It's four-dash-six-one-three-seven."

RICHARDS took the card, puzzled over it. "Hotel Campbell," he mused. "Maybe we'd better—" Suddenly he brought a notebook from his pocket and flipped its pages. And grinned.

"Hotel Campbell nothing," he said. "You're libeling Hotel Campbell, Boyd. This isn't a phone number."

"I called the place—"

"We found Ott's car in the barn. It was stolen two weeks ago up in Volney County. When he left the Golden Nugget Kerrigan must have seen them loading the pin-ball machine into it, and scribbled down the license number—for that's the license on that stolen car."

And he added, "After you left my house, I called the city cops. They'd picked up Pete Blackholm and Lefty Ghoss. They've been questioning them separately. Blackholm claims Lefty killed Skanlon, and Lefty claims it was Blackholm. They'll probably both go to the chair."

Richards sighed, walked over to Ott's corpse.

"One less mad dog," he murmured.

"Mad dog?" Boyd grimaced. "I think I'd better rush to town and see a doc," he said, staring at his hand. "Ott bit me—and I've had enough headaches tonight without getting hydrophobia."

THE END

"Mooney's in a Jam," a detective story by Kerry O'Neil, who wrote "Mooney Moves Around," is scheduled in our complete novel next month.



They heard a low guffaw; then the bidding came: "Stop right there, li'l children!" Another voice said: "Thus far and no farther!"

HEIRS OF THE BLUE SKY

By ANDREW WOOD

Who wrote "Submarine Treasure" and "Comrades of Chaos."

THE windows of the Criminal Court were open, for it was a close September morning. Outside, the buses lumbered sleepily past. The crowd of people which had gathered in the street to learn the result of the Dorleigh Trust swindle were getting bored with waiting. The newspaper headlines were dull: President Hindenburg was ill. A woman had flown the Atlantic. A new disarmament conference had begun. A mountebank called Hitler was stumping about Germany.

Inside the court, the judge was reaching the end of his summing-up.

"The amount involved is very large. It was mostly obtained, we are told, from small investors. In these days, the small investor is of immense importance even to a financier of the proportions of the prisoner, Gerald Dorleigh. They invested in the Dorleigh Investment Trust some six million dollars—their life-savings, in many instances."

The judge's voice went on, cold and dispassionate. His eye never glanced at four people, shabbily but neatly dressed, who sat a little apart on one of the public benches as if, though complete strangers to each other, they had come there by appointment.

"If you have heard stories of humble tragedy—of poverty and even suicide—you will ignore them. The district attorney has mentioned at least four heart-rending cases. But you are trying Gerald Dorleigh for fraud and embezzlement alone. Indeed, too much emotion has already been brought into this case."

There was a faint stir in the court.

"I refer," said the judge, "to the statement of the very able counsel for the

defense regarding the prisoner's health. I do not believe that a doctor can pass a death-sentence on any man; not even the distinguished heart-specialist who gave evidence. In any case, the matter is quite irrelevant and may, also, be ignored. It is in the hands of a higher tribunal than yourselves. It doesn't concern you."

The man between the two bailiffs was seen to smile faintly. He was young—no more than forty—to suffer from that deadly form of heart-disease, if it were genuine. Probably, thought some of the spectators cynically, he had bribed the famous specialist beforehand. He was clever enough. But it certainly gave relish to the drama. Two sentences at one and the same time! The face beneath the fine forehead looked strong and adventurous. An egotist's face. Not a sick man's, save for its pallor. He had taken big business-men on his directorates, but he always kept the whip-hand. They believed him a superman in that year of supermen, and some of them had crashed as badly as the lesser fry.

"The Man Who Walked Alone," murmured one of the lawyers, who had more than once dined at Gerald Dorleigh's penthouse on Park Avenue. "That's what they called him. He looks it too, even yet."

"He's still fond of his wife, I'm told."

"In his peculiar way. He never was a woman's man. Fond of his children, too. Two of 'em, out at some place in Connecticut—two boys; they're to be kept in ignorance, if possible. Poor woman!" The speaker glanced obliquely across the court. "She's standing it well. The strain must be terrific. I'm glad she's

sitting to the rear of those four queer devils. You can see the hatred playing about them. They give me the willies. . . . Hello, the jury's retiring. They won't be long, I'm afraid."

With the disappearance of the last jurymen and the departure of the judge, there was less than the usual hum of conversation in court. A faint sense of the bizarre seemed to emanate from the four people—three nondescript men, and a woman with a hard, stony face beneath a black *cloche* hat—who sat on the side bench. The newspapers had made much of them in interviews and photographs. A camera-man was edging close up to them now. A famous author and criminologist was scribbling in a notebook:

The Four Pitiful People, as they have come to be called. . . . Nobody troubles about their names. They look weird, though on the outside, they're ordinary everyday people, dazed under tragedy. Somebody belonging to each one, died of shock or suicide. The woman looks as though she would haunt every Dorleigh unto the third and fourth generation. They've lost all their money—they're the saving, avaricious type—as well as somebody they loved in their different peculiar ways. Wonder if the freemasonry of grief brought them all together, or whether they're being used as a newspaper stunt? It is my guess that, dramatic as they look now, they'll be normal human beings again in a month's time. They may even have a revulsion and send a letter of sympathy to the prisoner's wife when he dies in prison hospital. You never know. But they look like four black crows, at the moment.

HESTER DORLEIGH did not move as she watched her husband return into the dock; she sat immobile.

She had dressed so quietly and indeed even frumpily, that only the defending lawyers knew who the mature but still graceful woman was. Hester Dorleigh had always had an inner strength. Any woman who married Gerald Dorleigh needed that. She came to her feet with the rest of the court as the judge and his retinue returned. The jury looked grave, like men and women who had decided to do their duty. There was none of the nervousness of a jury on a murder trial, compelled to send a man to his death.

Yet few of them looked at Gerald Dorleigh, because they remembered the specialist's evidence. They were launching a man, if not into eternity, out of the

world for good, unless a miracle happened. . . . The bailiffs closed about him watchfully.

"Guilty on all the indictments."

Hester breathed a little quicker, that was all. The judge was passing sentence on the prisoner. . . .

Fourteen years' penal servitude. Fourteen years! Hester released her cramped muscles after what seemed a long time. It was near the luncheon-hour, and the court was clearing in a buzz of excitement. The four people from the side bench passed her quite close. The tall, gaunt woman, turning a stringy neck, said in a harsh voice to the others: "It doesn't give us back our money, and it doesn't give us back our dead, does it?"

THEN Hester felt a hand on her arm. It was one of the junior counsel, an ugly young man, but with kindly eyes.

"They'll let you see him for a minute or two, Mrs. Dorleigh, before he goes. He's taken it well."

A bailiff took charge of her among the clean, brightly-lit passages below. In a small room, her husband was standing between two other bailiffs. His mouth twitched into a smile at the sight of her.

"Hello, Hester! We don't kiss. Might pass me some poison or something, I understand. . . . Well, old girl, how is it?"

His voice grated a little with unforeseen emotion. Theirs had been a swift wartime marriage, whose passion had died down immediately and given place to later years of excellent friendship.

"About eleven, Gerald—with time off."

Ironically, he smiled. "That's great. They might be talking about another war by then: David learning how to drop bombs and Jonathan marching with a rifle. Listen, I want to talk about those two sons of ours. I'm fond of them."

"I know you are."

"You've got to tell them I died. You're clever, and you'll get away with it. Understand this, Hester. I'm going to drop out of the world. No letter, no visitors, no anything. Till—well, till the finish. That might happen any time, as you heard. If it doesn't, I'm still dead."

There was something brutal in his steely callousness about himself and her. He knew how strong she was, and traded on it. All he thought about was of their sons, fourteen-year-old David and six-years-old Jonathan. And he knew it was the same with herself.

"Those 'Four Pitiful People,'" he said suddenly. "I'm a bit afraid of them,

Hester. You saw them? They hate me plenty. They might try to hurt you and the boys. They're slightly crazy. As though a man could know—" He broke off. "No, they must be pretty well satisfied. You're safe. You'll be well off and well looked-after."

"Well off?" Already she had resigned herself and Dave and Jonathan to a life of obscure poverty somewhere.

His tired eyes lit for a moment almost boyishly, and then, in a strange way, became inscrutable.

"Dick Beniston will look after you all. I didn't bring Dick down altogether in this almighty smash of mine, so he's grateful for small mercies. I have his promise. He's going to be one of the big men in this country during the next ten years. I want you to go immediately along to Dick Beniston, Hester, for the kids' sake. It's not charity. He owes me—a lot."

Oddly, he lingered on the last two words. There was an immense strain between the two, man and wife. They had never really known each other. He had little use for any woman. Sometimes Hester had tried to be jealous of the deep friendship between him and Richard Beniston, and always failed, because without love there can be little real jealousy.

"I'd like to have lived long enough to see Dave married to Dick's daughter. She's the tremendous age of ten years now, isn't she?" Dorleigh said softly, and laughed at himself. "I said there was to be no sentiment! It seems the time's already up, Hester. . . . Lord, I feel queer!"

GERALD DORLEIGH swayed slightly, and his hand went to his throat. "Hold up!" bade one of the bailiffs, not unkindly. They had been warned about this, and the doctor was within call. His head dropped, and he was a dead weight between them.

"Lay him down," bade Hester swiftly, the first sob breaking from her. "Let me! I know how to look after him—I've seen him like this before!" She was kneeling, looking up fiercely at the bailiff whose hand came down on her shoulder. "I'm his wife, after all. I've the right—"

"You've no right, ma'am," said the bailiff, pulling her to her feet. "He belongs to the law. Here's the doctor. He'll bring him round. Better go now before he comes to. Time's up, anyway."

"All right," answered Hester listlessly.

She was escorted to a side door and found herself out in the bright sunshine,

walking, walking. She was aware only of the incongruous thing her husband had thrust into her left glove as she knelt by him. It was a gold fountain-pen. She could still hear his whisper against her ear. "*Give it to Dick Beniston. Don't fail me.*" It was for that alone he had gone into a realistic faint. For that, perhaps, and because he wished to put the closure on any emotional parting. Somehow, all that was like Gerald Dorleigh, whom she had never known.

One o'clock. . . . David and Jonathan would be sitting down to lunch in the little Connecticut farmhouse. Changing their surname to that of their mother for a whole vacation gave them a great kick. Hester craved to be with them and finish that nightmare day with them close to her. With luck, she could call on Richard Beniston and still reach them that night.

WHEN Richard Beniston glanced out of the window the avenue outside was empty, save for a taxi and a delivery truck. No men who might be reporters or plain-clothes dicks were visible. Beniston laughed jerkily at his own thoughts and walked to the tantalus on the sideboard. He looked at the light through the amber brandy in the glass he filled.

"Fourteen years! Well, he kept silent."

He stared moodily at the empty glass as he put it down. At the age of forty-five he was still handsome in a full-blooded way that lent him a lot of charm and magnetism, though there was a sallow touch in his cheeks now. He was as dead guilty as was Gerald Dorleigh—of bogus subsidiary companies, false prospectuses. They had worked them all together in secret after the first landslide from honest business, though Gerald was always the genius. And now Gerald, with a heart-lesion that was his death-warrant, was in prison. And he himself was scot-free, but without a dollar. To the outside world, he was one of the victims of a man who had posed as his best friend.

"Damn him—no, not that! But he could so easily have put an odd hundred thousand snugly away somewhere."

Ever since the arrest, his abiding terror had been that detectives would fall upon him, though already every trace of his guilty connection with Gerald Dorleigh was destroyed. Gerald himself had seen to that. Yet he found himself hating the man, shaking at the possibility that now, or perhaps years from now, he would be run to earth as the fellow-swindler of Gerald Dorleigh.



RICHARD BENISTON

Suddenly the telephone on the table trilled. He hesitated, then took up the receiver with a hand that had grown moist at the sound of the telephone-bell.

The voice which came was metallic; yet it held a slightly cringing note.

"Sallendine's the name, sir. Joe Sallendine. One of the Four Pitiful People, as the papers call us. It was my kid that died. Well, Mr. Beniston, we've held a sort of meeting. We've an idea that Dorleigh parked away a lot of money somewhere. Just an idea, Mr. Beniston. And you and the other gentlemen who suffered might help us. That's the idea. Share and share alike, it'd be."

"It's no use," answered Beniston, controlling his voice. "There's nothing at all, I'm afraid, Mr. Sallendine. I wish there was."

A pause. Joe Sallendine, at the other end of the wire, seemed to sniff disappointedly.

"All right, sir. Money aint everything. That's what I tell the other three—Mrs. Barstable and the two Creyne brothers. But they're bitter. Between ourselves, they've gone a bit cracked, Mr. Beniston. They'll never forget, never. Mrs. Barstable says: 'Watch his wife. If she keeps on living like a swell, there's money somewhere. There was others in it,' says Mrs. Barstable, 'others that have

feathered their nests—and we'll get them through her, if it takes us twenty years.' What do you think, sir?"

"I think with you that she's crazy, poor woman. I can't help you, Mr. Sallendine. Good-by."

He lit a cigarette. Four Pitiful People! A momentary chill passed through him. It sounded like a sort of secret society that would pursue its revenge, growing madder and madder as the years passed. When the door opened, he swung round with a start.

"DADDY, are you *never* coming to lunch?"

She was very self-possessed for her ten years, his daughter Celia, though quick and graceful as a deer already. In a quiet way she had become mistress of the house since her mother died. Better, perhaps, that he had no money now. Otherwise he would very likely bring her up to a spoiled womanhood. Though that was crooked reasoning.

"Presently, my dear."

"I'm going to a sound-picture this afternoon, so please hurry."

He smiled. "A *what?*"

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him. "You're hopelessly antique," she said. "The man in it actually sings a song called 'Sonny Boy' and it's all about father and son. Not about father and daughter, or I'd take you, though I've heard everybody weeps buckets of tears."

His eyes followed her as she went out, but his thoughts moved restlessly. They would be taking Gerald Dorleigh to Sing Sing or whatever prison he was destined for, about then—handcuffed, guarded—to a living grave. . . . Dorleigh had children too.

Then, looking up, he saw that his housekeeper was there, and behind her a quietly dressed woman. He schooled his features against the great and unpleasant shock of her appearance. He became alert, yet outwardly compassionate.

"Why, Hester!"

"He told me to come," she said. "I sha'n't stay long. You've heard?"

"Yes. It was a savage sentence. Sit down, Hester, you're exhausted."

But calm, thought Beniston. Calm and competent. It would have been much easier if she were helpless with grief. Easier to get her out of the house and put her into the taxicab outside. "There were others in it, and we'll get them through her, if it takes us twenty years."

"That daughter of yours is going to make a lovely woman." Hester Dorleigh passed her hand across her forehead and laughed. "Sorry. I didn't come along here to say that. Gerald gave me something to bring to you. He passed it to me secretly when I saw him, and I don't think the bailiffs suspected. This."

The heavy gold pen dropped into Beniston's palm. His fingers closed over it.

"A kind of keepsake," he said rather huskily. "Poor Gerald! They let him use it, I suppose. He wrote to me once. I bear him no malice, Hester. . . . If you won't stay for lunch, you must have a glass of wine or a cocktail before you go. I'll tell my housekeeper."

All his arteries were throbbing. A thrilling sense of hope made him feel dizzy. He patted Hester Dorleigh's shoulder before going from the room, remembering Gerald's boyish pride in his own miniature handwriting with that very fountain-pen. He looked at it. Yes, it was the same: the point a very fine one, a hollow pen of old pattern. Unscrewing it, his fingers pulled out a packing of thin, fragile paper. The tiny characters on it were clear. There was no need for any magnifying-glass.

Dear Dick: I had to do it this way, and wait till the last possible moment. All the doctors seem certain, so no more of that. If I do come back to the world some day, I shall have you to depend on.

I haven't let you down, Dick. There are five hundred thousand in bonds with the Banque Nationale in Paris, in your name. It was almost the last thing I did. Guilty money, but you and I won't worry about that.

Half of it is for Hester and my two sons. I want you to use it well for them, and look after them. I've got a hunch about airplanes. You know my hunches. Put it into aircraft. That's my advice. Start a factory if you like. Commercial planes, of course—though if there should be a war, then you're in clover.

You'll go up and up, Dick. Take my sons with you. I trust you.

After a while, Richard Beniston drew a long breath. He dropped the flimsy paper into the fire that burned in his den. Hester Dorleigh looked up when he went back to the room where she sat. Was her glance a little searching?

"Drink the cocktail, at any rate, Hester," he urged, and paused. "Tell me, how are you fixed financially?"

"I shall find work," she answered, still looking at him steadily.

"I'll send you a check. Please, Hester! For Gerald's sake. I can afford—well, perhaps a thousand. Stay down in the country awhile. And after I've found my feet again—"

"It's very good of you," she said.

"Do those boys of yours know anything?"

"Nothing. They never will. He made me promise to tell them that he's dead, whatever happens." Inscrutably her glance still hung on Richard Beniston. "What about Celia?"

"I'm taking her abroad tomorrow. To Paris. It'll all have blown out of the newspapers when we get back. She was at school until yesterday. Keep hidden in the country for a bit, Hester. Better communicate with nobody. Not even with me."

"It's very good of you," she said again.



"A YOUNG fellow like you," said the office-manager of Beniston's Aircraft, "ought to be flying. Patriotism comes before a safe job, these days. A college man, aren't you?"

"I try to forget it," said Dave Dorleigh.

It seemed to the office-manager that the applicant for a clerkship (and some hopes he had!) was trespassing on his own ground and being insolent.

"Bit doubtful about flying, maybe? Like to keep one leg on terra firma?"

"Maybe. Like old man Beniston himself and a number of the fat blimps who work in his office," said the young man, pleasantly. The plump finger, he saw, was already pressing upon the chromium-enclosed button on the desk. "All right, I'm going."

And Dave Dorleigh's footsteps crackled crisply as he went out. In one of the panel mirrors, the well-brushed but shiny navy blue suit he wore did not look so crisp. The sight of it made him shoot out his jaw aggressively at the two doormen who did not hasten to open the plate-glass doors for him to pass through.

Standing rather aimlessly at the edge of the sidewalk outside the big white pile of offices, in the hot sunlight of that day in early August, he reflected that he was

not a genuine derelict, for he had his mother and young brother Jonathan to look after. A sense of responsibility was a great thing—sometimes.

Just a little too late, he stepped back from the shining fender of a car that slid along to the curb. It came arrogantly, much too close in, touched the edge of his well-brushed coat and silently ripped a gaping hole beneath the sleeve as the big sports model came languidly to rest.

"Terribly sorry, but you were practically standing in the road, you know," said the girl who, without haste, stepped out.

Dorleigh grinned back faintly. "Something of the kind seems destined to happen to us whenever we meet, of late."

CELIA BENISTON stared at the young man. He had a square, clear-cut face that was sunburned, a scar that was scarcely healed at his temple and blue eyes. The best of her father's test pilots had eyes like that. Otherwise, though he hid the damage to his coat with his arm, he looked nondescript and shabby.

"I don't understand. I've never met you before," she frowned. The two door-men hovered watchfully in the background, ready to pounce if necessary.

Detachedly, Dave Dorleigh returned her gaze. He had some reason to hate her. Celia Beniston was just what he imagined; the small, glossy head slanted up at him, the impudent eyebrows flying away on each side of the impudent nose. Spoiled to Hades! Quite conscious that he was young and a man, down and out though he was. Beniston, according to rumor, allowed her twenty thousand or so a year and her own private plane.

"The last time was at a couple of thousand feet," he said. "Over Pelham. There was an old crate up, sky-writing for Osogood, the new metal polish, when a blue Beniston Swallow came and threaded through all the o's. Just a bit of cheap show-off on the part of the pilot, to amuse friends below."

"Was it?" asked Celia Beniston, her color heightening.

"It was. And not too well done. It came out of the last o and snapped over the old crate as it finished the final d. Just brushed the upper wing."

"It didn't!"

Dave smiled. "It did, lady. Then it soared gracefully away. The crate made a magnificent forced landing in a field. It was all hushed up. But the sky-writer—that was me—lost his job."

Another car, a large Rolls-Royce this time, stopped outside. The head door-man stepped forward like a walking ram-rod and opened the door for the great Richard Beniston. Celia Beniston spoke quickly, still slightly flushed.

"That was rotten luck. You ought to have let me know." She paused. "I could get you a job at one of the B.A. airports. There's my father, Richard Beniston. Come along, while he's on the spot."

"No, thanks."

"Oh! Why not?"

"Scared. Dead scared of leaving the ground. Like—"

"Like who?" she demanded in a suddenly hard voice. It was a challenge.

"Like the gallant Richard himself. Only it isn't so well-known."

The color left her cheeks. Her eyes froze all at once. She looked Dave up and down, making him flinch in spite of himself. And then something unexpected happened. She said, "I believe you're Dave Dorleigh, aren't you?" And they looked at each other, for a second, like the children they had been eleven years before.

"Get inside, please, Dave," Celia bade, opening the door of her car.

Quickly she thrust him in before he could do anything. The sports model hummed from the curb; she made a grimace at Richard Beniston as she shot past; then they were in the traffic.

"I'd be bitter as fury myself," she said, all at once, her glance frowning ahead. "But you know, my father never could find your mother, though he tried hard. He's not the kind of man to let down his best friend when he dies. What on earth were you doing at the office?"

"Trying to get an office job. Sort of cussedness, I expect. Where are we going, Miss Beniston?"

She replied succinctly: "To the field, Mr. Dorleigh—to get you a job of flying."

HIS mouth tightened. To him, she was still the adventurous rich girl, doing anything for a lark. She didn't guess that he had only spoken the naked truth about himself. That forced landing in the crazy old crate had done for him. True, the smack against the instrument-board seemed nothing, a mere graze that knocked him silly for an hour. But he sweated yet at the thought of ever climbing into a cockpit again, sweated every night in a to-be-continued nightmare that had to be kept secret from his mother and his young brother. . . . It

was true about old man Beniston, for that matter. He sent men on ocean flights and up into the stratosphere, used up a score of gallant lives each year. The Beniston Prize itself was worth ten thousand to the winner. He built great transport planes and some aircraft for the army. But would Richard Beniston ever leave the ground? He would not.

"You've changed a lot," Celia said.

"So have you."

She smiled at him sidewise. Dave did not guess how grim and unsmiling he himself looked.

"Better looking, don't you think? But not really so nice. Blame my father—but of course, you do." She was all at once passionately desirous of finding out something about this young man. "How is your mother? I used to like her."

"Quite well, thank you."

"Thank you, Mr. Dorleigh."

DAVE'S hands clenched as the big archway of the Beniston Aircraft field hove into view, with two great Beniston Sparrowhawks roaring above it. It made him slightly sick to look up at them. When the car slid through the arch,—gatekeepers, dungareed mechanics, alert young men in flying-clothes all seemed to know it,—he wet his lips. "Listen, please—"

But she was moving lightly across to where the blue Swallow was already warming-up. The men here weren't mechanics, Dave thought in almost savage desperation; they were Celia Beniston's lackeys. They knew what she wanted before she spoke. One of them took him into a dressing-room and gave him a flying-suit; and as he climbed into it, his skin prickled. She was waiting by the Swallow, now, taxied onto a runway.

Above the din, she shouted: "You're taking me for a ride. I want to see what you can do."

White as paper, he caught her by the shoulders, letting himself go. "I can't! I've forgotten how; I'd bring her down and we'd both be killed! You don't know what it's like to see the ground throw itself up at you—" He dropped his hands quietly. "I'm scared, that's all. I'm going home."

Her eyes went up and rested on him. They flicked to the scar on his temple, and she herself paled a little, knowing that somehow she had to heal the scar on his courage, the lesion in his nerves.

"There's no hurry. Dave, it was always a mystery to me about your father.

I liked him, in a way. He died in a drowning accident abroad, didn't he?"

"What?" He shuddered out of his daze. "Yes. I only know from what my mother told us. At Biarritz, when he was there on business. He saved somebody, but didn't come through himself because he couldn't swim. She won't talk about it much. . . . I see what you're driving at. I'll come. But you take the controls."

"No. You'll take them, Dave."

Without a rejoinder, he clambered into the front cockpit. The familiar reek of gas and leather, the death-trap that enclosed him snugly, made his stomach heave. Well, why in hell shouldn't he kill Beniston's daughter and himself, if she wanted him to? The Swallow roared across the field and sailed up like her namesake. If he looked over, they were done. To look up at the blue sky was as bad. There was death on every side, jeering at him. Then a thought brought comfort. He was in that to-be-continued nightmare, of course. He had only to let loose and go screeching to earth—

A hand touched him from behind, or did he imagine it? But it jerked him out of a bad dream. He flung over-shoulder:

"Take over, or we're finished. I can't do it."

Celia laughed. "You're doing fine. And there isn't any dual control. Look at the height—we're three thousand feet and steady as a rock. Drive her, pilot!"

IN the mirror he saw her eager face and a tendril of her brown hair that had blown from beneath her helmet. The plane beneath them gathered mighty life and leaped toward the horizon as he opened full throttle. Into all his veins ran a contentment and a sense of power. Looking over the fuselage, he saw the earth below as though it belonged to him. He knew then that never again would the nightmare spread its black and broken wings over him. Celia Beniston had taken it and shaken it out of him for good, putting her own life calmly into his hands in order to do it.

"You'll do. Let's go back now, please, Dave. I'll phone my father and tell him about—about finding you again in this absurd way."

The metropolis hung on the tip of his wing as he banked round. The Swallow was part of him. When she came to a landing, he spoke.

"Thanks. Not for the job, if it works out—but for everything else. I'll never forget."

As though she did not want his thanks, Celia Beniston was down from the machine. A Rolls-Royce stood on the asphalt by the bank of offices, Richard Beniston's car. He came forward to meet them, his eyes narrowed in the light of the sun.

"This is David Dorleigh, Daddy," Celia said. "He's good. He's going to fly for us."

"Is he?"

His face was like a mask, smiling faintly. If there could be such a thing as deadly enmity at sight, it came alive in Dave Dorleigh as he gazed at the elder man. He had a feeling that it was answered. But that must be all wrong, because mixed with it there was also fear, apparently—and that was absurd.

It all passed in an instant. Richard Beniston's hand was in his own.

"Glad to meet you again, David. It must have been some kind of instinct that made me follow this harum-scarum daughter of mine up here. You handle that Swallow even better than she does. You're engaged, young man. See my chief pilot."

Abruptly he turned away, leaving Celia to gaze after him and then at Dave. The air about the two of them seemed to have chilled.

DAVE wished sometimes that his mother were not so sweetly impassive, so locked behind something she never wished to open again, and never intended to, whatever happened. Fighting the world alone for Jonathan and himself made her like that. But it was all over, now. It was a fortnight since he had become one of the junior technical pilots of Beniston Aircraft. She was pleased; tears had sprung into her eyes; but she had been silent for a long time afterward.

"We'll get out of this hole," he said one afternoon that followed a spell of night-flying. He looked out on the grimy street where they lived, and then, with a frown:

"I still hate Beniston, Mother, though I've only seen him once."

"That's foolish, Dave. We never had any claim on him." She paused. "What about Celia?"

"Never seen her since."

A knock sounded at the door. "It's a telegram," said Hester, and her hand involuntarily went to her breast.

Quickly, Dave tore open the yellow envelope which was addressed to himself,

and a grunt of amused disgust left him. He read the message aloud to Hester:

Slight accident to Jonathan hurt ankle while we were on urgent business in the country but nothing serious can you come first train tomorrow and take him home. Address Loudwater Farm, R.F.D. 2, Ramapo Center, New Jersey. Sallendine.

YOUNG Jonathan, aged sixteen, had lately become a junior private detective. He swept the grubby office and copied the infrequent letters of the Unicorn Private Detective Agency for fifteen dollars a week. Small, bullet-headed and independent, Jonathan was a happy-go-lucky young lad who walked alone more than his elder brother liked. He was devoted to the sole proprietor of the Unicorn Agency, one Joe Sallendine. Till Edgar Hoover was ready for him, he was the Unicorn's, body and soul. He must have shot off into the country with his employer that morning and come the cropper he deserved. It was like young Jonathan!

"I wish we knew this Mr. Sallendine," said Hester uneasily. "He seems about as irresponsible as Jonathan himself."

Dave spoke thoughtfully. He too did not feel too easy about his self-contained younger brother, and his mysterious employer.

"I believe I might get down to him this evening. Leave it to me, Mother, and don't worry."

He reached the Beniston field quickly, remembering that there were usually a dozen or so planes available, and he meant to slip off with one. One did that sort of thing, nowadays. . . . But the sight of a big blue Swallow, and the girl who stood beside it, brought him up.

"Going somewhere?" asked Celia Beniston laconically. Their glances lingered on each other. It seemed, in the most extraordinary way, that they came close together with some premonition of approaching and fantastic evil that concerned them both.

"Something's happened to my brother Jonathan out in Jersey. Nothing serious. But I've a sort of feeling—"

"I know. I suppose people of our sort are badgered about so much in this mess they call the modern world that we develop extra instincts about people we love, like young brothers and fathers. Doesn't that sound clever?" She flashed a rather forced smile. "I felt a sort of goose walk over my own grave. You may

take the Swallow. She's all trimmed. And may I come? I need fresh air."

"Heavy nights?"

"Heavy father." Celia tried to be flip-pant; then: "He's been a bit worried about something. He got a letter the other day. It seems ridiculous, but the address was some prison—from the warden, I think. It might have been about some convict, for all I know. A man like Daddy makes a lot of queer enemies. Well, let's take her up."

On the map, when they looked at it a quarter of an hour later in a Swallow that hummed westward at a cruising hundred and fifty, Ramapo Center was marked as in a wedge of a valley in the Ramapos—with three farmhouses pricked out on it, miles apart. Dave thought he could feel the girl's warm breath on his cheek when she leaned over, laughed and said: "I feel better. The original David and Jonathan never had anything like this, Dave. Less than an hour from town, and it's the edge of beyond."

The sun was getting low and the air growing cold as they dropped for the valley in the Ramapos. What on earth were Jonathan and his employer doing in such a wild and God-forsaken spot? Abruptly Dave remembered that a penitentiary was no more than fifty miles distant. A herd of cattle thundered away from their shadow. For a moment, at different points of the compass, three farmhouses, one of them standing by the white ribbon of a waterfall, were visible. Then a tree-topped hill intervened.

Celia pointed.

"We'll not get a better landing than this."

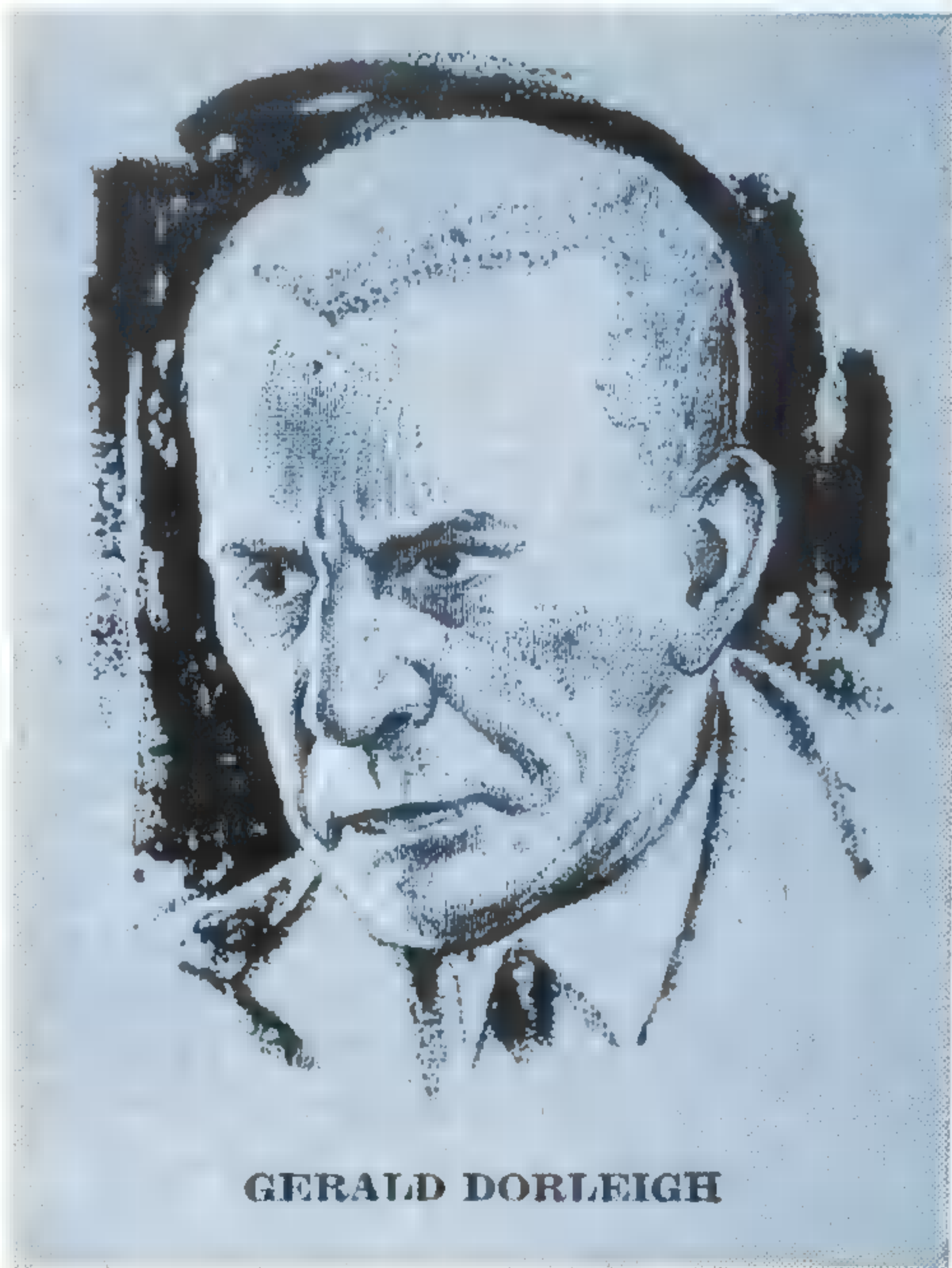
It was rough, but quite safe. From the sky they came down into desolation and loneliness. Somewhere a river brawled hoarsely.

"'Loudwater.' That means the waterfall, I guess. We'll follow the creek."

THE dusk was creeping up and thickening. It would be dark before they reached the plane again. Dave Dorleigh felt his pulse quicken as he and Celia Beniston stumbled along by the creek. Loudwater hung over the waterfall, a bald, gray little place. Celia said in a low voice:

"Let's take a look round, first. Don't laugh, but I dreamed about this place last night, or else one very much like it. I believe I'm a little scared."

A lamp glowed behind a yellow blind. It was possible to move through the gar-



GERALD DORLEIGH

den undergrowth and reach the window. As they drew near it, a woman's laugh burst out, loud and short. It cut above the sound of the falling water like the rip of linen. They crept close and looked under the blind. Long afterward Dave Dorleigh remembered how the girl who was so soon to be his enemy closed her hand over his.

Four people sat at the big dining-table. The newly lit lamp shone on all their faces. In an old farmhouse chair sat the woman, gray-haired, gaunt and powerful as a man. Dressed in deep black, she sat quite still, with her hands on the table. On either side were the dark, battered and triangular faces of two men, obviously brothers. They and the woman imparted something of a Hogarth quality to the room. Only the fourth person, a little man with twinkling eyes as cold as ice on each side of a hooked red nose, and a shaven, monklike head, looked at all human. The brisk sanity about him contrasted with something that was weird in the other three.

The woman looked across at him and then round the table.

"'Four Pitiful People!'" she said softly. "Well, here we are again. 'Time like an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away.' But it leaves us, it seems. Now you've gathered us all together again, Joe Sallendine, you'd better bring in the prisoner, Mr. Gerald Dorleigh."

"Wait a minute, Mrs. Barstable," said the little hook-nosed man, in brisk tones.

"We'll bring Dorleigh in pretty soon. Let's have everything shipshape. Sure, you're in the chair. But I'm secretary, so to speak. The Four Pitiful People, Incorporated. A company formed for the purpose of getting back what belongs to it. That's us."

His shining smile quietly dominated the other three persons in the farmhouse room. The woman, formidable as she was, eased her body in the chair, and listened. Outside, by the window, the son of Gerald Dorleigh, who had believed his father bravely dead eleven years before, felt the girl by his side come nearer to him in sympathy and pity. They were both very quick of understanding and strong of nerve, like most of their generation. Mettled and ready for catastrophe to their world, since their elders had, ever since their schooldays, led them to expect one. Celia whispered, "Hold it, Dave!" and that was all.

SALLENDINE was speaking again. He had some notes on the table before him. It was obvious that it pleased him to bring a pretense of business to that fantastic meeting.

"Ten years and eleven months ago," he said, "We all suffered disaster in the Dorleigh Trust smash. Joseph Barstable, a small business man, lost twenty thousand dollars, the fruits of over thirty years of work. The poor man committed suicide. I believe you still are a widow, Mrs. Barstable?" He cocked an eye at the impassive face opposite, coughed and went on: "In the case of Frank and Everard Creyne, they lost a dear sister. Her money vanished in the Dorleigh smash, and the man who was to have married her disappeared. Her body was found floating in the Hudson."

One of the two men shuffled. "No use going over it all," he said. "It's long ago. What we want to know—"

"I come, in this brief review, to Joe Sallendine," said Joe Sallendine unwinkingly. "He lost his boy because he had no money to send him to Arizona to get better. It was all gone in the Dorleigh smash. His wife died too. Eleven years ago, it was. The boy would have been eighteen years old this year. But that's sentiment, and we're not here for that."

A clock on the mantelpiece ticked sharply. Breaking the silence, Mrs. Barstable said: "It was funny how you managed to get in touch with us all again, Joe Sallendine."

Joe Sallendine smiled all round, again.

"I set up as a private detective. If you do that, you mayn't get much business, but you're bound to find out things. I found out about a Mrs. Ellen Barstable, who ran a little pawnbroker's shop on the East Side. She was doing well, until a woman client tried to throw acid over her; then the police found that she was unregistered and did a little blackmail on the side. They closed her office. She'd been in jail, before that."

"It's a lie!" snapped the woman, a vein standing out on her forehead.

The little man shrugged nervously.

"Tut-tut! What does it matter? Our friends the Creyne brothers, have been in the same place on a Sullivan Law charge and for robbery with violence. I'm afraid they were spoiled for honest work by the public subscription at the time of the Dorleigh case. We got a few hundred each, didn't we? Not bad. But we're going to do much better."

"That's it," said one of the other men huskily. "Come to business!"

"I'm doing so. Let me finish with my own humble self. Like the rest of you, I have deteriorated," said Sallendine, with a sigh, though a glacial twinkle passed over him. "Grief ennobles one, but it doesn't last. I am now purely a business man. When I learned a few months ago that Gerald Dorleigh hadn't died in prison, but was a normally healthy convict soon due for release, I got in touch with my old comrades. For one thing, I needed a little capital. There was this house and other expenses; there might also have been a little violence necessary to persuade Dorleigh to come along here."

The dark face of the man before him split in a grin.

"He came. A man just let out of stir isn't expecting a snatch; we got him between us while he was waiting for the train, and he was too surprised to make a move."

"It was a neat job," Joe Sallendine said smoothly. He patted the man's arm. "You're an able gorilla, Everard. It came off just as I planned it."

THE woman covertly watched the little man in the lamplight. So also, in their more animal way, did the other two. They recognized, if reluctantly, his right to leadership through superior wits—though perhaps the woman was not far behind him in cunning.

Joe Sallendine made a gesture to the two Creynes, and the two men passed

through a shadowy doorway beyond the lamplight. Almost immediately they returned. Between them was a man with gray cropped hair and hollow, brilliant eyes, with a bony yet vital frame that ill-fitting clothes did not hide. Gerald Dorleigh sent a look of detached curiosity round the room. Easily, he sat down on the chair Joe Sallendine indicated, and waited.

"Cigarette, Mr. Dorleigh?"

"Thanks, I don't smoke, nowadays." Sallendine leaned forward.

"Okay. Well, listen: You're Dorleigh. We're the Four Pitiful People. Remember them? This isn't a melodrama, so I'll not talk about vengeance and that sort of thing. There's something more important. When the receiver finished with the Dorleigh Investment Trust, just five hundred thousand was unaccounted for. Vanished into the blue, you might say. It was there, yet it wasn't there. If you're going to retrieve it from its hiding-place, now that you're a free man, Mr. Dorleigh, you might take us with you."

IN the silence that followed, the soft roar of the stream outside came into the room. The immobile face of the man addressed contrasted oddly with those of the other four people. There was hatred rising like a miasma about him, hatred from these four for their ruined lives and for their old griefs, which though dead as the eleven years of change that lay over them, came to life again at the sight of him. Covetousness and hunger for money was there, paramount, but not these things alone. The woman's hands on the table were clenched.

"I see." Dorleigh reached out a hand. "I'll try that cigarette after all, Mr.—Sallendine, isn't it? I wondered why a poor devil of a released convict should be attacked and kidnaped." He paused, and laughed, but his mouth was tight. "Well, I've enough money to take me out of the country, and that's all. There's no half-million dollars, and there's no hiding-place. Look at me, you four pitiful fools, and judge if I'm telling you the truth! I'm dead. I mean to stay dead."

Moisture stood on his upper lip. He was not so nonchalant as he pretended. Ellen Barstable said: "Somebody else is keeping it for you, you liar! We'll twist it out of you before you leave here."

With a glance, Joe Sallendine silenced her. He spoke softly. "Dead? But what about your wife and two boys, Mr. Gerald Dorleigh?"

"Keep off them!" he snapped. The eleven years had got into his nerves after all. The picture of his two sons, rising to power and money with Dick Beniston, had kept him sane for eleven years. The picture of Hester, his wife, on the other hand, had grown dim in his memory. His sons would look after her.

"You'll judge if I'm telling the truth," he said, more quietly, looking at Joe Sallendine. He did not seem so insane as the other three. "In this way! Those boys of mine think I'm dead. I'm going abroad to live as a poor man. South America, I think. Follow me, if you like; if you find me digging up any hidden treasure, it's yours. I swear there's none. I'm as poor as a rat. I'll stand it, so long as those two sons of mine are happy. But that's a sentiment you wouldn't understand, Mr. Sallendine. It's the only sentiment I have."

"No," said Joe Sallendine woodenly. "I only had one son, myself. . . . Happy, you said your sons were. Plenty of dough? No doubt they have."

"Pretty well off, I imagine," answered Dorleigh. "I haven't heard much of the outside world. By the way, I'm interested in a man called Beniston—Richard Beniston. Has he been heard of lately?"

"Beniston Aircraft," Sallendine said. "A big shot, he is now. He has one of your sons with him."

"One?"

"As a pilot," said Joe Sallendine, his words dropping like slow poison, "at sixty dollars a week. He's been at the field a couple of weeks. Ran into Beniston's daughter, when he was nearly down and out, and she hired him. The other—young Jonathan, you know—is my office-boy. A nice kid—the image of what my own boy would have been. Fifteen bucks a week. They live in town, them and their mother. Bless you, they're sure their father's dead. Proud of him, they are. Died saving life! Well, Mr. Dorleigh, young Jonathan's in this very house, and David is coming in the morning. Thought they might like to meet their father, Mr. Dorleigh. Unless you'd rather come across with the truth about that loot you've stacked away."

BY the creeper beneath the window Dave Dorleigh stirred. He was conscious of no feeling but a cold alertness. This released convict was their father. There was no gallant death, no proud memory—but only something crooked and sinister! He wanted to laugh.



CELIA

DAVID

"We must try to get them both out. Both Jonathan and—him."

That was Celia Beniston speaking. She pulled him into the laurel bushes, her eyes big in the dusk. A small brooch, two turquoise wings clipped under the chin of her helmet, glinted as she spoke in a clear, low voice. It was the same kind of voice she had used to him when he was sick with fear at the thought of going up into the sky again. He knew all at once that ever since that moment, he had loved Celia Beniston.

"Don't let it get you down, Dave," she said. "It's a ghastly shock. But it's no disgrace. The sins of the fathers aren't passed on, nowadays. That's old stuff, unless you except all the politicians who've gummed things up so nicely for you and me. . . . We've got to move fast."

"How?"

"That's up to you. I'll help. I'm not afraid of a little rough stuff—and once they're out of the house, we could get them away in the dark. That weird crew would never find us." She shuddered; then: "Dave, you don't mean you're just going to leave him to take it?"

He replied slowly: "No, I'll not do that. There's Jonathan. He must be upstairs."

A new moon was just coming up over the distant hills. Dave picked up a rusty bar of iron, remnant of some old fence, that lay in the long grass.

"When you hear me smash the lamp," he said, without any excitement, "throw a stone through the upstairs window.

That ought to set Jonathan moving, and maybe make them think there's a crowd outside here."

He strode to the door of the house. His soft-soled shoes made no sound, and the handle turned beneath his touch, so that he was inside the lighted room before any of the occupants realized it. His actions seemed, to himself, to be deliberate and slow-timed, though the lamp at the ceiling made a noise like a small shell-burst when he hit it, and a squirt of blazing kerosene and falling glass tumbled the Creyne brothers out of their chairs. It gave him time to snatch Gerald Dorleigh and hustle him toward the door.

"Get out," he said. "I'm your son Dave." A resounding crash above told him that Celia had thrown her stone. In the darkness, Mrs. Barstable tackled him like a quarter-back, but he broke free.

INTO the garden, the Creyne brothers came leaping through the open window. One of them ran satisfyingly upon a short-arm jolt, but the other dropped a rubber club on Dave's shoulder that numbed him to the finger-tips. All at once he saw the small but plump figure of Jonathan by his side, and heard his bewildered voice. "Dave! What the heck's happened? Here, let's find Joe—"

Celia panted into his ear: "You look after Jonathan. I'll take your father to the plane."

She found herself enjoying it all, in a queer way. She and Gerald Dorleigh passed together out of the garden into the pasture. It was more important to get him clear of the house first. The best tactics were to scatter. "I'm Celia Beniston," she said briskly. "You remember me? I've a ship not far away. I'll put you in a safe place, then come back and look for Dave and Jonathan."

They moved quickly. It was easy to find the way back by the river again under the faint light of the moon. The dark ground soaked them up. Looking back, Celia decided that Dave and Jonathan had managed to lure the chase away. The man by her side did not speak, but moved with the rather horrible docility of one who had obeyed others for years. They reached the Swallow, in the rough field where it had landed, in silence. She wished Gerald Dorleigh would say something, and also that she hadn't that desire to keep a space between them. . . . He was Dave's father, and she knew quite simply but with a deep thrill that she loved his son. . . .

Planes had not been common when Dorleigh was last in the world, but he managed to clamber aboard. The cockpit light showed his face with a smile that seemed to be etched upon it with a graver's knife. Celia stepped on the starter. And when the Swallow, terrifyingly near a stone wall, left the ground, he spoke at last.

"Thanks. That was exciting. So you're Celia Beniston, and that was Dave?" he said. "Dave knew who I was, too. You both overheard that scene, of course."

"Yes." She tried to speak soothingly to Dave's father. "But Dave will explain. I shall put you down at the B. A. field—they're usually night-flying and the lights will be on. Then I'll take a car back here."

No, she didn't want to talk to him. It flashed upon her with a sense of disaster that she felt a hatred of him similar to the hatred Dave Dorleigh felt for her own father, though it was mixed with a strange horror and pity of this man who had once been her father's friend. He wanted to be thought dead. But he *was* dead, in everything but body.

He was speaking again, as though reading her thoughts.

"I was quite guilty when they sent me to prison, Celia. But it was crime on a grand scale. That half-million Sallendine mentioned was chicken-feed. You were only ten at the time. Everybody thought I'd die within a few months. But they put me into the hands of a doctor who had some new kind of treatment. It either acted, or else the groggy old heart patched itself up, in spite of all the specialists. It was disappointing, in a way. I'd arranged for Dave and Jonathan to think I was dead. Their mother helped me. I never even wished for news about them. I was a monk as well as a convict, of my own free will. . . . I don't bore you, I hope, Celia?"

"No." Celia's fingers closed hard on the control-wheel, her eyes fixed on the compass. "But—was that right about your having planted a lot of money?"

SHE had no right to ask the question. It seemed to jump from her lips before she knew. In the mirror, she saw his face, touched by the faint greenish light from the instrument-board. It looked all hard bones and eyes brilliant with mockery. Far from normal, but who would be normal after eleven years in a penitentiary?

"The woman was right. I left it where a man who was as deep as myself in the Dorleigh Trust Funds, could find it. He was also a close friend, Celia, but no breath of suspicion ever fell on him, thanks to me. I asked him to share the money with Dave and Jonathan, to take them under his wing. Would you say that any rich and successful man had taken my sons under his wing, Celia?"

"No. But perhaps—" She gulped and said weakly: "You don't love them; you love nobody."

"I loved that man who has betrayed me," said Gerald Dorleigh. "But I'm going to bring him down. He's a big man, now. He has powerful friends. But he'll have to go to the place I've just come from. That's only fair."

THERE was little passion in his voice. He had gone beyond it, and was almost musing as, no doubt, he had often mused in his cell. To him, Celia Beniston was still the ten-year-old schoolgirl.

"Dave and I will manage it," he said after a pause. "He'll get over the shock of finding me alive, if it means finding his birthright too."

Celia thought, fiercely: "*You're an ex-convict, a swindler, and you talk like a Bible-character!*" But then, so was her own father a swindler! A glance over the fuselage showed the twinkling lights of Eastledge. She banked steeply, and wheeled away from them. Up there she could think, and once on the ground, Gerald Dorleigh would be out of her hands. One thing was certain: She had to checkmate him in some way.

Reaching down, her fingers groped in a little pocket and closed over a small, flat automatic pistol. It was a light-hearted memento from Chick Preston, the B.A. ace who had come down among wild hostile tribes in Yucatan without once drawing the weapon from his pocket, save to hand it to a native craftsman, who had cut a little intaglio of silver into the butt. Celia thrust it into her own pocket. It gave her an illusion that she held the whip-hand over the man behind her, at any rate.

Dave! She and he had to fight each other, now.

Don't think of that, yet. Sufficient for the moment was the evil thereof. Nowadays one got the habit of living the bit of life one stood upon, without looking too far ahead.

"Are you quite comfortable?"

"Quite, Celia."

The nose of the blue Swallow pointed northwestward now, into the stars of the Great Bear that blazed across half the sky. She said, quietly:

"I'm not landing you at Eastredge, after all. I'm taking you to a place off the Maine coast. It's a small island, about three miles from the shore, and my father has a cottage there. At least, it's mostly mine. It's really an old lighthouse, but quite nice. You're going to stay there until we decide what to do with you. . . . And please understand that if you tried any tricks we should only both crash. Or perhaps I might just be able to get control again after I'd shot you. A pilot has done that before now, you know, when his passenger has gone off his head."

There was a silence. She saw his face in the mirror for an instant, as though he realized for the first time that she was a woman.

"I seem to have crashed head-on into heavy stuff," he said. "Times appear to have changed, Celia."

"You bet they have!" she replied, almost somberly.

"There's no war, yet?"

"Not yet. Next week, maybe."

CRUISING at half-throttle at two thousand, she watched him cautiously. His calmness and his patience chilled her. Was she a fool? Sooner or later, he would escape from Winnetuck Island, though Jim Crick and his wife, who looked after the Old Light, would be pretty tough to get away from. . . . He said nothing more, and even seemed to nod into a doze that might have been real or pretended. Celia fought against an impulse to start pleading with him, to promise him his half-million, on her father's behalf, until she realized the cowardice and uselessness of it.

It would have to be a night landing on Winnetuck, but she had done it before. Jim Crick, that ex-Navy electrician who had lost a leg in a North Sea mine-sweeping job, had rigged up a searchlight of his own for the occasional transport plane which sometimes brought Richard Beniston's daughter and a gay little party up at any old hour. Half an hour before midnight, the Swallow was circling the low little islet with its ring of breakers, and its white old lighthouse, so plain outside, but so comfortable within. It was not necessary to drop any flare. Jim Crick had heard the Swallow, and knew the sound it made. The landing-lights

on the green tableland below began to sputter unsteadily and then settle to brightness.

"You know, Celia, this is interesting to a man who has been in retirement during the arrival of the air age," said Gerald Dorleigh; "but it's quite useless. I'll bet that I shall be in New York within three days."

"You can't swim three miles of rough water," Celia replied, between her teeth. She flung round on him. "Oh, what the devil right have you and my father to bring back all your misery and wickedness to the world? There's enough of that in it! People like Dave and me have enough to put up with, as it is, through what your silly lot did, when it had a chance of doing so much better."

Confounded at herself, she bit off the words. The plane came up into the wind and went down easily into the brightness below. Jim Crick came limping out of the sharp black shadows.

"Get hold of him," ordered Celia curtly. "He's your prisoner, Jim. Keep him and watch him. Never let him out of your sight till I come again. Get that?"

It was obvious, from the way Jim Crick's hamlike hand fell on Dorleigh's arm, that he got it, and would get anything that Celia Beniston told him. But nothing could ever shake his grinning calm or the amiable smile of his French-Canadian wife Margot Crick.

"I'll make him part of meself, Miss Celia," said Jim Crick, who was half Irish.

"I'm not staying, Jim," said Celia.

"I'll see you later, Celia," said Gerald Dorleigh.

The white light made him look haggard and brutal and lost, like a hundred other men in the place he had just come from, who reaped what they sowed. But he was so infinitely cleverer than most of those that Celia's heart sank. It was impossible to forget that he was thinking of his sons and not of himself. There was a crooked unselfishness in it all. He would have stayed dead for them. But to destroy the man who had played him false, he would come alive.

"Take care of him, please, Jim Crick. I'll be back soon."

THE stars had darkened over when she roared up in the sort of climbing turn that would have made the hair of most of Richard Beniston's pilots stand on end. It was all rather like the dead end of a nightmare beyond which one

could not see. The Four Pitiful People Dave and his young brother somewhere out in the Ramapos. . . . An ex-convict who was Dave's father, patiently biding his time till he could escape and break into pieces all she held dear. . . .

There sounded mockery in the beat of the engines. They seemed to be telling her that they were very powerful, and so was Richard Beniston's daughter. But what they had done that night together was completely in vain. She fingered the little automatic in her pocket, and laughed. That was heavy stuff too, the threat she had made to shoot Gerald Dorleigh, though it might have been a simple solution to everything. In imagination she could see the headlines. How would they put it? "*Richard Beniston's Daughter Shoots Father's Blackmailer.*"

"And after that, you'd have to put in another clip for Dave. And those Four Pitiful People. The place would be a slaughterhouse!" Celia jeered at herself.

SHE slept heavily until past noon in her room, which, though furnished in chromium and mahogany, had an almost austere plainness. It was the telephone that awakened her. Richard Beniston, out of town since the day before, would be home in an hour or two.

"Come as soon as you can, please, Daddy," Celia said. "It's terribly important. No, I can't say anything on the phone."

She was dressing, when the other call came. The sound of Dave's voice made her catch her breath. It was all so like flying blind, when one must make split-second decisions. There was both relief and strain in his tone.

"I wondered if you were home. I got Jonathan clear, and we waited for you till nearly daylight. Then we found a road and a farm truck that gave us a lift to the station. Nearly had to knock Jonathan cold to stop him from going back to the Sallendine guy. I never told him anything. He thinks Sallendine and he were going to do a big job of work on a race-course gang who were trying to get their pals out of Sing Sing." His voice fell. "Where have you put him, Celia?"

She hesitated, then took the split-second decision.

"Please come along. He's safe. But I can't tell you everything now. You know, I think my father could help quite a lot." It was a mad thought, perhaps; but somehow, she might be able to arrange something between her father and Gerald Dorleigh's son.

A pause; then: "I'll come, thanks. He mentioned your father to those four crackpots, didn't he?"

"He and Father were old friends, weren't they?" She tried to speak naturally. Both of them, she noticed, were talking as though about somebody not quite human. "Come at two, Dave."

First, she would tell everything to Richard Beniston. Looking round the luxurious room and out onto the garden, the thought came that it was perhaps all built out of fraud, with money stolen jointly from poor people, in an era that was dead and gone, by Dave Dorleigh's father and her own. So, for that matter, was the big Beniston plane that droned over the distant trees. . . .

When the Rolls-Royce sounded on the drive, she felt quite cool. Richard Beniston passed his arm about her, with a quick laugh.

"What's all this S.O.S. business? In debt again?"

His ruddy face was still finely contoured; there was a lot of gray in his hair, but she felt that maternal sensation toward him which had always set the modern part of herself wondering a little. He was an egotist, unscrupulous where his success was concerned, but his secret gifts to charities were enormous. Women still liked him.

"No. I want to know if you've heard of the Four Pitiful People, Daddy?"

He sat down, and she sank beside him on the big couch. The color went from his face, but the eyes, hooded by skin at the corners, were alert.

"Go on, Celia. There's something in this."

"Gerald Dorleigh's free. He didn't die. He came out of the penitentiary a day or two ago. Somebody told him—well, that you didn't keep a promise you made him, to look after Dave and Jonathan. He says you were as guilty about the Dorleigh Investment affair as he was, and he left you a lot of money to share with them. But he's a liar, isn't he?"

BENISTON looked at his daughter. She was rather white, but she didn't show her feelings much. None of these young people did. Nor did they ever explain anything. They were a closed book to men like him.

"You don't think he's a liar? I knew he was due for release, Celia; and long ago I knew he wasn't going to die, as people thought he would, at the time he was sentenced. If I may ask,"—the

ghost of a smile crossed him,—“where is Gerald Dorleigh at the moment?”

“At Winnetuck Island. I’ve got him there safe. I’ll tell you all about it later.”

“He is a liar, Celia. I needn’t ask you to believe that. It’s no more than a dangerous attempt at blackmail. Poor Gerald! But men can deteriorate. At Winnetuck! What are we going to do with him there, eh? I’d like to keep the police out of it.”

HIS glance fell before her clear gaze. He felt hesitant before this girl of his, with her clear vision, and crystal coolheadedness. His hand fell upon hers, and her fingers curled over his, protectingly. She didn’t even pretend to believe him. But her love for him did not falter, for one moment.

“If you made it all up to his son, I believe he’d be content to disappear and never be seen again. David knows about him, but he doesn’t know who—let his father down.”

A streak of color came back into Beniston’s cheek, but he began to speak softly.

“And let him marry you? That’s what the boy would be after, you know. Let him marry you and take him into the family, my dear? I’d rather see both Gerald and his son dead at my feet. Indeed, I wouldn’t say no to that, at all. I built up Beniston’s Aircraft with my own brain. Gerald would have thrown that money around and lost it in a month. If I’d gone near Hester Dorleigh and her two sons, those four lunatics would have been after me, and in those days—”

Celia broke in, in a low voice: “They may be after you, yet, Daddy. I’m afraid of that. But go on.”

“I’ve got a bodyguard. Men like me have to have. I’d have the four jailed, if they came near me. And—God, the man has no proofs about that business! You’d never understand, Celia. In those days there was plenty of loose money, and people took risks with it. They thought prosperity would last forever. I’ll deal with that jailbird, and I’ll keep his son as one of my pilots—” He passed his hand across his forehead, then laughed. “Don’t get me wrong: I won’t murder the one and send the other up in a cracked machine! Now tell me how you came by all this.”

“Not now. Later. I don’t approve. But I’m on your side, of course, Daddy.”

She saw him walk to the tantalus on the sideboard. His hand was unsteady, and he was shaken in spite of all his brave

words. For an instant he turned to look at her over his shoulder. At a movement from him, she was at his side, in his arms.

“Don’t think too badly of me! A lot of us did crazy things in those days. I’ve been on the up-and-up ever since; I have the respect of the other men in this business—the most important business and the finest lot of men in this country. Stand by me, Celia.”

Celia lit a cigarette, and passed out onto the terrace with Nodder, the blear-eyed bull-terrier. She could think better there. That split-second decision on the telephone, she knew now, had been all wrong. Dave and her father must not meet, now. . . . Presently Nodder cocked his ears and began to growl in his good-natured way. Celia ran quickly to the little gate that opened near the drive gates.

“Here we are, Dave. It’s better outside here. Sorry to have troubled you. Dad’s out.”

“That’s why his car’s on the drive, I suppose. Say, you look all smashed up. What happened?”

She found herself leaning back against a tree, pressing its trunk.

“Plenty. For one thing, wild horses wouldn’t drag out of me where that man Gerald Dorleigh is. If he does escape and come here, he’ll only get sent up again for blackmail. So if he happens to get into touch with you—warn him.”

“Thanks. That’s a bit illuminating. It sounds as if somebody was badly scared, and with reason. —Your own father, say.”

“Go away, please, Dave.”

“Just because two climbers committed some crime years ago, and one went to jail and the other didn’t,” he said in overwhelming and passionate bitterness, “why the hell should they pass on their precious sins to us? It’s not good enough, Celia. We don’t deserve a raw deal like that!”

“I know,” said Celia. “That applies to all of us, doesn’t it? But we’ve got it. You’d better go.”

THE young man pacing along the quiet Westchester street cupped his fifth cigarette in his palm to hide its glow. Moodily his eyes went to the dark house through the trees. Dave Dorleigh was keeping watch on Richard Beniston and his daughter, and cursing himself for it. . . . It was more in young brother Jonathan’s line than his own. How much he was there because he hoped to get a

glimpse of Celia Beniston, he would not admit even to himself.

One thing he did admit: He hated Richard Beniston. What his feeling was for that other man, Gerald Dorleigh, he was unable to say. But there was the bitterness of youth in it.

The summer mist was thickening; it was time to be going home to that brave mother of his, who knew nothing yet. It was then that Dave noticed another person who loitered not far away. He stood on the grass, and threw an impatient glance in the direction of the Beniston mansion. A glint of light from a passing car touched his face for an instant. It made Gerald Dorleigh's son stiffen in recognition.

A gate clicked. Another man approached the one who waited there. It was Richard Beniston himself who came by the private gate out of the garden of his house. His burly figure was unmistakable. The two met and looked at each other.

DAVE crouched on the grass, his heart thumping, as they passed him. It was dark enough to follow, in the shadow of the trees. Something utterly beyond himself compelled him to—some dread that dried his mouth.

He caught Gerald Dorleigh's laugh of flat amusement.

"Surely we're far enough away from observation? Good of you to keep the date at any rate, Dick. Good of me to phone you first too, I think."

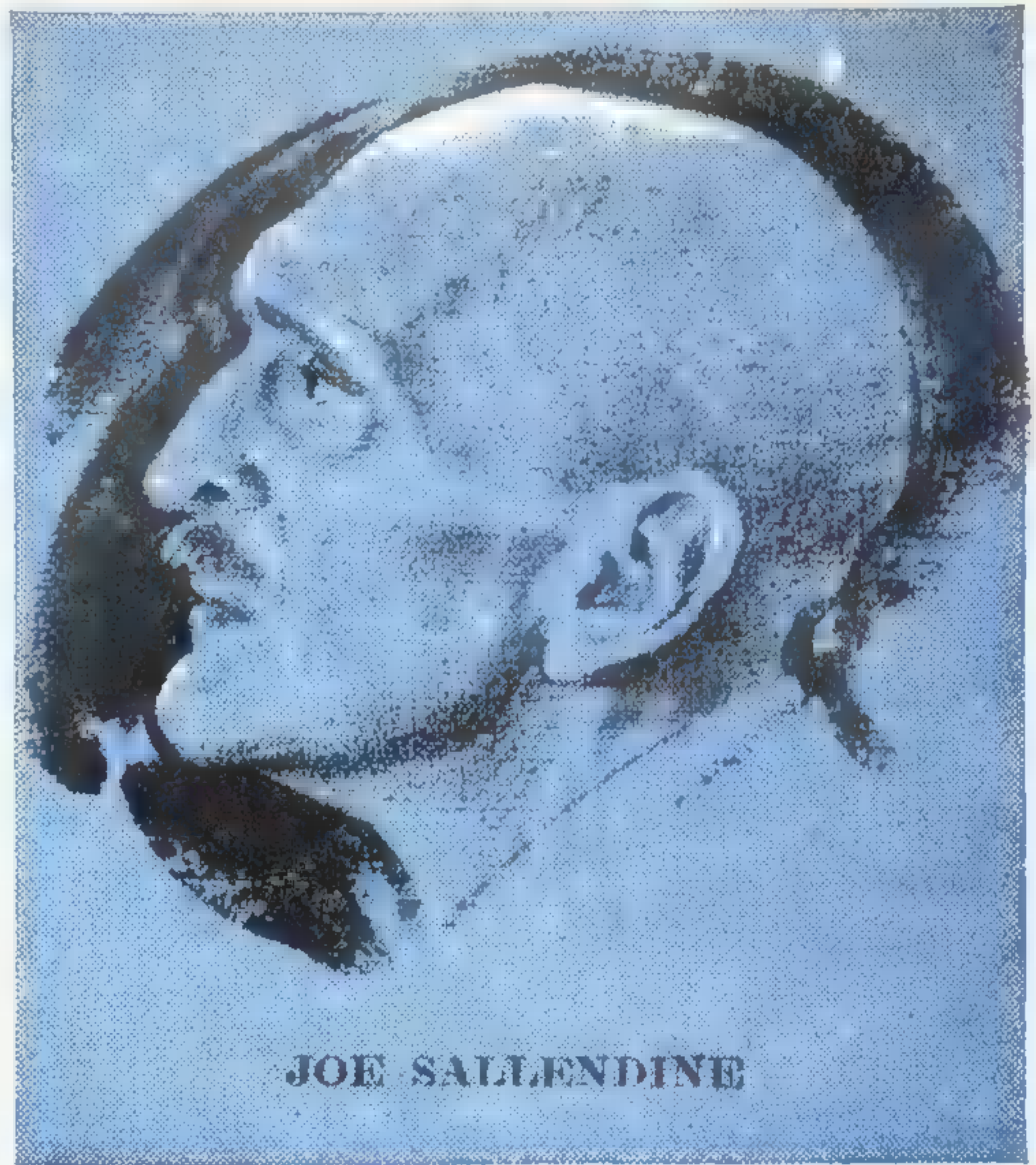
"How did you get away?" Beniston's voice was taut, breathless.

"From the island where Celia dumped me? A boat by night. The patience of Job. Glad to leave. There were some high cliffs, and that little Canuck housekeeper woman of yours took to coming up quietly behind me—"

"If you're suggesting I instructed her to do away with you—" Beniston checked himself. The fog was gathering so quickly that the two men were only dim figures to Dave, near though he was. "Don't be a fool! You've got no proofs, Gerald. Listen, man: I made a bad mistake. I'll make it up to those two sons of yours, I promise. But you've got to disappear again."

Once more, Dorleigh laughed. It was not a nice sound.

"No, Dick. Not good enough. I'm vindictive now. You know what love turned to the other thing is. Well, I worshiped you once."



JOE SALLENDINE

"So you'll have no mercy now, Gerald? Is that it?"

The two men looked at each other. Perhaps some inextinguishable feeling from out of the past touched both of them. Gerald Dorleigh turned away, and as he did so, there was the pale glint of a light evening cloak and Celia Beniston stood beside them.

"So you got clear? Somchow, I thought you would," she said to Dorleigh; then: "Sorry to have followed you out in this way, Daddy, but I thought there was something queer."

Richard Beniston spoke quietly. "Get out, Gerald," he said. "Or I won't be responsible for my actions. I don't want to talk with you, with my daughter present. I'm through with you."

It was difficult to see what happened. There was a sharp report, and a flash which the mist diffused into a faint light. Gerald Dorleigh swayed with his hand to his breast, looking at the man with whom he had once mingled the thread of his own unscrupulous life, had once loved. Then he pitched face forward to the grass.

AFTER a period, Richard Beniston moved, and, with a quick movement of his tense body, he knelt by the prostrate figure where it lay on the grass, and lifted the head. Slowly, at length, he lowered it, again.

"He's dead, Celia," he said. "He's dead, you know. The bullet went straight through his brain. Don't come too close, my dear. Not that he looks bad, poor Gerald. I'm glad it was quick."

Alertly, he glanced round. Straightening himself, he looked down at the man

who had once been his friend. And then he saw his daughter kneeling as he had done, feeling quickly for the heart that had been scheduled to stop eleven years before. She was making sure.

Celia glanced up at him and shook her head. Yes, they certainly had iron nerves, this generation . . .

"Give it to me, Daddy, please. Quick!"

He knew what she meant. She meant the weapon that had killed Gerald; and he had no such weapon. On the other hand, he was sure for a minute that out of panic for him, she herself had fired.

Instantly, Celia understood. . . . She turned and looked sharply into the misty bushes. Her brain pictured a little hook-nosed man, two other men, and a big gaunt woman, all hiding there, all pleased at their revenge on one man and at the net they had spread to catch the other—Four Pitiful People!

IN the dead blanket of the mist the rumbling night song of traffic on the mile-distant Post Road floated with unusual clearness. A dog barked in one of the houses on the fringe of the park. Then somebody stepped beside her and her father as they stood together, shielding each other from dimly sensed danger.

"It's I," said Dave. "There's nothing uncanny about it; I guessed he would come, sooner or later, so I was hanging round. Which of you did it? I didn't see clearly." He moved toward Beniston. "I guess it would be you."

"Steady, son," said the other man, with unexpected gentleness.

Dave felt a sudden tightness in his throat. He didn't look at Gerald Dorleigh, but all at once a pain that was almost physical gripped him from nowhere and took the place of grief. It unsteadied him with old dim memories of a man who had always been remote from him, yet worshiped as a bright being.

"Neither of us did it, Dave," said Celia in a low voice. "Though I brought a pistol with me—like a fool. I was scared of those Four People. Look at it if you like. It's loaded, so be careful with it. But neither of us did it."

She put the little weapon into his hand; and once again Richard Beniston felt, with a pang of jealousy through all his fear, that he stood quite apart from them. Dave broke the pistol and took out the clip. An empty shell fell from it into his palm.

"Well?" asked Celia; and then before Dave could reply, Beniston spoke with

forced calm. He was barely visible in the thickening fog.

"How long are we going to stay here? You've got the whip-hand, I suppose, David. Better call the police and get it over, if you're going to. Somebody who was hiding in those bushes shot him, but you've an excellent sporting chance to hang it on Celia and me. Not often a young man like you gets such an opportunity, David."

"Be quiet for a moment, please, Father," said Celia, stepping close to Dave. She made a low sound as she saw the empty cartridge-case.

"Somebody must have taken it from the drawer in my room and fired it, then put it back," she said slowly. "I know it sounds the lamest story ever invented. The window-cleaners were at the house yesterday. It wouldn't have been difficult for anybody to do it. Sorry I can't think up a better idea—" Her voice faded a little. "I didn't, Dave. I wouldn't! For one thing, I'm not such a good shot; for another, I was sorry for him and on his side a bit—in a way. No, I never did, Dave. That pistol's a frame-up, and not a very good one. But believe what you like about it."

He wondered at first whether she spoke the truth; and then he knew with utter certainty that she did. She would have never pulled a trigger on Gerald Dorleigh, not even in panic—and it was hard to picture Celia Beniston in that state. He was slipping the automatic into his own pocket when she took it quickly back from him.

"Let him keep the damned thing, Celia!" advised Beniston.

"No!"

Dave told himself that he saw clearly Richard Beniston's purpose, which was to disappear with Celia and leave him to be discovered by the body of his father, the released convict, with the pistol in his pocket. Or was he unjust? His head throbbed. No more than a minute or two could have passed since the shot was fired, but it seemed to be hours.

Beniston's voice came again: "Let's all go into the house and talk it over, David, before there's any more shooting from the bushes. They might have an ambition to get all three of us."

"You're right," he agreed.

BEHIND the three of them the mist closed in before they had moved a dozen yards across the grass, and the park seemed empty of anybody. The sensa-

tional discovery of the body of Gerald Dorleigh the swindler, just released from prison, would be postponed till daylight at least.

It was hard to find the path to the gate that opened into the garden of Richard Beniston's mansion, harder still to open it without a sound; for the bull-terrier Nodder came plunging at them from somewhere. So far as both Celia and her father were aware, none of the servants knew that either had come out of the house. Beniston had stepped from a French window, and Celia had slipped after him after putting a light cloak over the frock she wore. Beniston heard her speak behind him, as he went ahead through the gate.

"Dave's gone. Somehow I thought he would. You needn't be afraid, Father. It's only because he thinks he'd better leave us to it."

THE room they entered from the low terrace was just as Richard Beniston had left it. Celia carefully drew the curtains and switched on the standard lamp that stood by the statue in the corner—a surprisingly graceful and beautiful bit of sculpture, an alabaster figure with wings, Richard Beniston, of Beniston Aircraft, who had never been in the air in his life, was very proud of it.

"Celia!"

"Well?"

"That boy has some notion of holding us to ransom. He thinks he has me—just like that. Don't you see? It's monstrous. But if he can plant that shooting on me, or even the suspicion of it—well, there's motive enough, isn't there? And the scandal will finish me." His hand brushed across his forehead. "I thought a lot of that man Gerald once. When I saw him tonight—I wish it was possible to undo the past! But it isn't. So I shall have to fight, and smash Gerald's son. I don't want to."

"And the Four Pitiful People—they're in it. I'd like to argue with you about Dave, but I won't."

"They're not pitiful people now," said Beniston. "They're vicious. But I can't set the police on them, Celia. I can't let it be known that I know anything about them. You see?"

"I see."

She averted her face a little, for Celia saw, all right. He had built his gigantic business, his factories, his machine-shops, his air-fields, all by betraying his friend who lay dead on the grass a couple of

hundred yards away. But he meant to stick to them, and to the flawless reputation he held. What man wouldn't?

A muscle moved in his tense jaw. "I know what you're thinking, Celia. And I'm going to sound like a humbug now. The country needs men like me, and all I've built up. And I've been on the level since that investment business with Gerald. A lot of fine men at the factory trust me; I've never let them down, and we're doing useful work. We'll probably be forced into this war, eventually. I mustn't go under."

That was true, too. In this crazy world she and Dave Dorleigh had been born into, they needed bombing-planes by the ten thousand in order to keep the peace or win the war. The whole world was engaged in a gigantic blackmail and the only hope was that it would all quickly pass, and the air age would be here, in which space and time dwindled to nothing and the nations would only be corners of the same village. Beniston's Aircraft may have been started on "blue sky" speculation; now it would help save the world by building planes for battle in the real blue sky.

"You'd better go and rest," she said in a low voice. "Nobody is ever going to know, except—the person who did it. And somehow, I don't think Dave means to take his revenge or anything like that."

"He's too noble and generous, you mean?" asked Beniston.

CELIA rose to her slim length and picked a cigarette from the jade-and-silver box on the table. A precious gift for any man she was, Richard Beniston thought, as fine in brain as she was in body. She gave her faint smile.

"No," she said slowly. "He's like me. Sick! Dead sick of hatred. He only wants to have his life—like me. He'd give anything not to have this handed on to him—like me, too. Several million of us in the world would give anything not to have had handed on what we've got—things like the new B. A. War Eagle IV, if you get me, Father. We'd rather do without them and have something more sensible. . . . Sorry, I guess I'm a bit shaken up myself."

Richard Beniston made no answer. He was staring at the telephone on the table, which all at once had begun to buzz gently in the silence of the room. It brought back that morning of Gerald's conviction eleven years before, when the voice of Joe Sallendine, one of the Four Pitiful



MRS. BARSTABLE

People, had come whining over the wires to him.

Celia picked up the receiver before he could reach it. A woman spoke at the other end, softly at first.

"So it's you, Miss Celia Beniston? You'll do, dearie. This is Mrs. Barstable, speaking on behalf of the Four Pitiful People—since you know all about us. That was a smart bit of business out at Ramapo. Thought us more or less crazy, didn't you? Well, we're not. Only one of us. He went off the handle and did the trick in the park tonight. My, I was wild at first! Don't ask me who it was, —Mr. Sallendine or one of the Creynes,—for I won't tell you that. . . . What did you say?"

"I said I was listening."

"You're a cool little piece. Well, listen: We know who was in with Dorleigh, and that's the great Richard Beniston. He got the treasure. Dorleigh spoke the truth when he said he hadn't a cent. Well, he's off the map, though he'll be on it again all right tomorrow when his body's found. Before that, even, if somebody in the know chooses to take a walk through the park and trip over it—and raise the alarm. Get me?"

Celia closed her eyes. Easily she could picture the gaunt and relentless face of the woman, mocking her; herself as wicked and as insane perhaps, in a different way, as the man who had killed Dave's father. If it really was one of the three men, and not Mrs. Barstable herself, as it might easily be.

She kept her tone controlled: "You've a message of some sort. I'm waiting for it."

"You're fresh, aren't you? All cocktails and chromium while better people starve." The venomous note seemed to twang the wires, then quieted: "You'll come to the address I give you at nine o'clock tomorrow night. Make a note." She gave a number on the lower East Side. "Bring your boy-friend, if you like," she added. "We don't mind. You'll be safe so long as you bring exactly sixty-five thousand two hundred dollars, which was the amount stolen from us eleven years ago. We won't take a cent more—not at present. And no tricks, miss, if you care anything for your father. We've got him tight."

The warning came coldly matter-of-fact—and then the receiver went dead. Richard Beniston stared at his daughter when she replaced it. He had heard it all on the extension which he sometimes used when he worked in this room with one or another of his secretaries.

"I won't give it to you, Celia. It's dangerous—"

She shook her head.

"It's horribly dangerous if you don't. Besides,"—she said something which expressed the startling and quixotic honesty of her kind,—“it's theirs, you know. They're entitled to it. It wouldn't be wise even to send one of your precious bodyguards to watch me from a distance. But I shall be quite safe. And I might find out a lot of things. I mean *we* may. Because I shall take Dave with me, if he'll come."

THE open newspaper had lain for a long time on the table in front of Hester Dorleigh. She folded it away mechanically, aware, with a comfort that choked her, of each of her sons standing by her side.

"You see," she said, "what a liar I've been."

"We shall never think of them as lies," Dave told her slowly. He had kept everything of what had happened during the last few days secret from her, and if he could help it, she should never know. "Forget it all from now on, Mother."

Jonathan kissed her solemnly; bullet-headed, snub-nosed, and alert as a street gamin. Privately, Jonathan wished passionately that his employer Joe Sallendine, of the Unicorn Private Detective Agency, could be put on the Chanford Bay Park shooting, of which the father

he barely remembered was the victim. But Joe Sallendine had suddenly disappeared. His brother Dave looked grim when he mentioned Joe, but wouldn't tell him the reason for it. Jonathan had never got to the bottom of the mystery of that business out in the Ramapos when Dave had suddenly swooped out of nowhere and kidnaped him from Joe. But he was still goofy on Joe Sallendine. If Joe Sallendine suddenly appeared and whistled to him, he would go like a shot.

ON the way to the flying-field that afternoon, Dave looked at the newspaper headlines. The shooting of a notorious ex-convict had loomed bigger than the war in Europe for one edition. It was a first-class mystery. Gerald Dorleigh had been found by a policeman three hours after midnight, shot dead in Chanford Bay Park, and there was no trace of his murderer.

It was good to step into the cockpit of one of the big, sleek monoplanes and roar up into the hot blue sky, leaving the wretched earth behind, lending his life and his young body to find out whether this was one of Beniston's planes that would kill a man, or leave him gloriously alive in order to kill other people. . . .

He saw Celia Beniston when he glided down on the runway again. She was waiting for him. Smooth, high cheekbones, clear boyish eyes that watched him wistfully as he stepped down. She walked under the knife-edge fuselage and pretended to inspect it with him.

"Well?" she said in a low voice. "How did she take it?"

"She is always brave—my mother is."

"She must be. Dave, my father's afraid of you. He thinks you might try to—well, to use what you know."

He shook his head and said simply:

"No, I won't. I hate him. We hate each other. But it'll stay at that. Let the dead bury its dead, Celia. Life's too short."

Her eyes were bright with an unusual touch of moisture; her hand brushed his. Then:

"You're a great character, Dave. . . . That Barstable woman called up last night. I'm taking a whole pile of money to them tonight at a place on Cracknal Street down on the East Side. Exactly the amount they lost, eleven years ago."

"I'm coming with you."

"That's what I hoped you'd say. Nine o'clock. I'll see you in the club bar soon after eight. He gave me a check for my

private bank account, and I drew the money in hundred-dollar bills. Now I suppose you'd better go on with your job. She smiled a little wryly. "Father's not keen about my flirting with his pilots."

DARKNESS had fallen, and the floodlights were lit on the flying-field when Dave found her perched on a stool in the bar of the field club, along with a cheerful bunch of young air-addicts. She slipped easily out with him, and his own little second-hand car took them down to the harsh, flaring life of the lower East Side.

Cracknal Street, when they found it, after parking the car, was a narrow slit of dotted lamps shining on old warehouse walls. They had a feeling every step was watched. Their hearts beat harder than either would confess when a voice spoke gently behind them, and a figure moved to their side.

"Escort for treasure, eh? This way, please."

A lamp fell on the shiny beaked nose of Joe Sallendine. He smiled, went ahead, and stopped by a glazed window on which letters were still decipherable:

BARSTABLE

Loans \$5 to \$5,000 Without Security

A door opened, and he shepherded them gently and with a proprietorial air along a corridor that reeked of musty water and stale ink. At the end was a lighted room.

The three people in it sat at a table, just as they had done in that old rum-runners' hang-out in the Ramapos. Each face watched the door as Dave and Celia entered. It was the woman who spoke.

"Put the money on the table," said Ellen Barstable impassively.

There was something more fantastic about them than before. An expensive chinchilla coat garbed the woman's big figure; a turquoise brooch glowed under her chin; a long cigarette-holder hung in her hand. The two men, Everard and Frankie Creyne, were garbed in obviously new suits, and a bottle of brandy stood before them. They were sleek-haired and scented, yet more like pariahs from society than ever. Only Joe Sallendine, in his shabby but neat clothes, with an old-fashioned white stiff collar and a silk handkerchief, looked his real self.

Celia answered: "Not yet. I want to know where we all stand. I've brought just as much as you say you lost in the Dorleigh smash, eleven years ago. You can't have any more."

"Oh, no?" said the woman, raising sleepy-lidded eyes to the girl.

She held out a big hand. From the pocket of her greatcoat, Celia took a compact bundle and tore the brown paper from it. Into the middle of the table she scattered the crisp banknotes with a quick movement, and watched the glitter in the eyes around at the wealth they saw in such prodigal array. Mrs. Barstable jerked forward; the Creyne brothers crooked their fingers. An unbalanced greed showed upon all three of them. It was what she had hoped for.

THEN Joe Sallendine's purring voice came:

"No, this isn't a free-for-all. Very clever idea of yours, Miss Beniston: You know human nature! But I'll take charge."

There was a silence, while the notes crackled under his fingers as he gathered and bundled them again. Expertly he sliced them into three parts, and handed the portions to the two men and the woman. He lit a cheap cigarette with a hand that trembled. Celia found that she stepped back from the little man when he turned his glance with a smile. There was something in it that shook her a little.

"Eleven years is a long time ago at your age," he said. "It's like yesterday when you're mine. My kid died, and his mother followed him. Money doesn't pay for that. But I don't mind these poor unfortunate people getting their due in cash, if they want it that way."

Celia drew a breath. She said: "What other way do you want? Was it you who shot Gerald Dorleigh? That way isn't worth it. It isn't, I tell you!"

"You mean it leads to the chair?" Joe Sallendine spoke mildly and looked over to the man called Everard Creyne, who sat with a fixed grin, his layer of hundred-dollar bills gripped in his hands. "What do you think of that, Everard?"

"Nuts!" said the man, grinning widely.

Dave looked round the table with his wits at full tension. There were degrees of insanity, he was aware. In the everyday world tens of thousands of people who were not wholly sane moved without the others ever knowing it, unless something touched them off. These were not insane. Nor were they cold-blooded blackmailers. Far from it! Mrs. Barstable certainly looked like a woman *Shylock*, but something more too. The Creyne brothers were thugs, but some-

thing more, too. One of them had shot Gerald Dorleigh. Joe Sallendine—he couldn't estimate Joe Sallendine. But one thing alone they had in common: they had all been thrown into poverty and oblivion by Gerald Dorleigh and Richard Beniston, and had never forgotten it. . . .

Sallendine called: "Hello, in there! Come out, Jonathan, my boy!"

Dave stood still as he saw his brother Jonathan emerge from the room behind, and grin at him with mingled defiance and apology. Sallendine rested his arm on the boy's shoulder.

"He came here when I whistled. He'd do anything for me. Fond of old Joe S., aren't you, Jonathan? Darned if I'm not fond of you too, and I don't care if Brother Dave's jealous, either. Just like my boy would have been, he is. Away you go, Jonathan. We'll call you when we want you again."

Dave became aware that Celia's fingers clipped on his wrist as he stood by her side, and he realized that whenever she touched him, fear, which had come to him more than once or twice during the past few days, melted away. Even the icy fear he felt for Jonathan.

"We'll let Beniston know when we need some more. He'll pass it on to you," said Mrs. Barstable. "And you can tell him that if he makes any false step, he's done. Tell him that, Dorleigh."

"Okay, Barstable," said Dave. He turned to Joe Sallendine with a hard smile. "Do we get my brother Jonathan back again this time, Mr. Sallendine? If so, we'll take him with us."

NEITHER Joe Sallendine nor anybody else answered; for there was an abrupt crash of glass at the end of the corridor which led from the room, and a heavy series of thuds on the locked door. In the street outside sounded the racing whine of a car-engine, then the splinter of timber as the door slowly gave way. Dave caught Celia and heard her murmur as though a tragedy had happened: "He's sent somebody for us. Oh, he's made a mess of things!" He saw Everard Creyne rise from his seat at the table, grinning like a pale wolf at the doorway, with an automatic the replica of Celia's in his hand. The doorway filled with the bald-headed, powerful figure of a man Dave had more than once seen moving unostentatiously close to Richard Beniston, of Beniston Aircraft. Everard's pistol barked a dull

flash; the bald head sagged, and the man crumpled. An oath came from Sallendine. His fist sent Everard Creyne staggering away against the wall, but Mrs. Barstable spat at Dave: "No go, Mr. Dorleigh, Junior. We thought of this!"

Violence came alive in her. Something crashed on David's temple from her hand; and one of the Creyne brothers had him gripped by the waist. As the strength ran out of him from the woman's blow, he heard Joe Sallendine's voice giving curt directions, and then there was a period of blackness. . . . After a long time he could hear the gurgle of water and the faint *phut-phut* of an internal combustion engine, monotonous and steady. A lamp swung overhead. He was aboard some sort of boat—a motor-barge, he judged, remembering the slip that ran in behind Cracknal Street. There was blood on his cheek, sticky, wet. Mrs. Barstable had hit hard. With wonderment, because he thought it never could have happened to him, he realized that his legs and arms were firmly bound.

The generation that had made a mess of it once, had made a mess of it once more, Dave told himself, with a faint grin at the joke. Richard Beniston had sent the flower of his private bodyguard to save his daughter from the Four Pitiful People, and the man had failed.

David must have lost consciousness again. Possibly he was drugged, and so was Celia Beniston, who lay by his side, or else he dreamed it all. There was daylight, and then there was darkness once more; and a big car, through the window of which he could see a golden half-moon riding in a sky above the hills. Dave Dorleigh, who had hardly ever left New York since boyhood, caught the scent of spruce and wet leaves. He had a feeling that perhaps neither he nor young Jonathan, nor Celia Beniston, because they belonged to Gerald Dorleigh and Richard Beniston, would ever see New York again.

"**H**ERE'S something for you two people to eat, if you feel like it," said the voice of Joe Sallendine.

Celia stirred and sat up on the broad oak couch which held her. Her mouth was dry, and her head ached. She glanced at the watch on her wrist, and knew that it must have stopped. It showed eight o'clock, but the sun shone high and hot through a large octagonal window heavy with dust. With an involuntary surprise, she caught the glint

of water dancing through the thick branches of trees outside.

"It's a lake in the Adirondacks," said Joe Sallendine, watching her. "A little island with a bit of an old stone house on it. My property. Bought it for a song for a sort of way-station on our route in Prohibition days—same as that place in the Ramapos. It was built by some rich guy for a summer place, but he died, and it's too lonesome for most folks."

There was in his cool friendliness something terrifying which neither Mrs. Barstable nor the Creynes could have inspired. "I went to New York more than forty years ago," he went on. "Met and married that girl of mine who died of grief when we lost the kid. Of course I've told you." Sallendine seemed to check himself. "I keep on telling you. But it's fixed in my brain. . . . Just like Jonathan, he was. Oh, yes, Jonathan's here."

DAVE nodded. He must humor this Sallendine. The other three were violent, and one was a killer, but they were not so coldly dangerous as this one. They had forgotten their griefs, but Joe Sallendine never had, never would. He had planned everything painstakingly. "*Jonathan's here.*"

And Joe Sallendine's boy, who would have been just about as old as Gerald Dorleigh's son, had died.

"Jonathan's enjoying himself," said Joe Sallendine, with his shining smile. "He's quite willing to wait for explanations. Anything that Joe S. does is good enough for him, and he's never been on a place like this before. Island House, it's called, and it sounds mighty grand, doesn't it? All the same, I give us four days before the police come. But you can do a lot in four days."

"So you're expecting the police?" asked Celia, keeping her voice as cool as she could.

Sallendine rubbed his glistening beaked nose with his silk handkerchief.

"Oh, sure. That fool Everard shot one of your father's gorillas, and hurt him. He's too handy with his gun, altogether. It upset the whole appplecart. I'd liked to have brought Beniston—beg pardon, your father—to his knees first. I tell you, I never thought he would have sent those men."

"Neither did I. I didn't want him to. You were entitled to that money, and I wanted to give it to you."

"That was kind," said Joe Sallendine, a savage irony flashing through his impassiveness; but immediately he was smooth again. "Well, we got clear, didn't we? The ship was behind the office of the Barstable—I call her that when she's in a good enough humor to let me, you know—and there was a small motor-barge ready for emergencies. We went around to the North River and up the Hudson to—never mind where; then we transferred to a closed truck that brought us along here. . . . I'm proud of this place, I am. It's a good hide-out. Even if all this hadn't happened. I'd have brought Jonathan here in good time."

"And killed him?" asked Dave through his teeth, and the man who was Jonathan's idol answered:

"That's a strong word. My boy wasn't killed. He only died slowly; and he never knew it, because meningitis hit him at the last."

Joe Sallendine coughed, then rose from the old chair he occupied. His slightly stooping figure passed out through a heavy door of patched oak. Immediately he had gone, Dave went across to the octagonal window, and peered out. Tall fir trees covered the tiny island on which the house stood. A few ruined outbuildings and shapeless rocks down at the water's edge completed the place. Damp and dismal in its everlasting twilight, it looked indeed a retreat for mad people.

DAVE burst out: "This is all crazy, Celia! We've got to get away somehow with Jonathan before that man does him harm. There must be a boat—" He paused, with a flicker of hope: "Where are the other three? Sallendine might be alone."

Celia shook her head.

"No, I don't think so. Remember, they're hiding here from the police. That's the dangerous thing about it. They're none of them normal. I think, somehow, that the sight of that money must have just pushed Mrs. Barstable and the Creynes over the edge. Did you see their faces when I put it on the table? They all but pounced for it, all of them. They don't trust each other. Each one of those three would like to get away with all that money. I suppose they brought it here with them."

"That might give us a chance. If we could only deal with Sallendine separately! He's a lot cleverer than the others."

"I wonder if—" Celia began.

"If what?"

"Nothing. I was only wondering. We'd better eat. Somehow, I think Jonathan's safe, yet awhile."

THEY ate from the tray of canned food and coffee Sallendine had left behind. But every moment increased the feeling of fantasy. The waters of the lake lapped, and a wind set the trees rustling drearily. An owl or two hooted; there was a stealthy tread on some staircase just outside the door; and then, all at once, in a room overhead a woman's voice was raised in song. It was Mrs. Barstable's voice, and she was singing "Ben Bolt." The old-fashioned song came unmelodiously. "*They have fitted a slab of granite so gray, and sweet Alice lies under the stone.*"

No sound of Jonathan. Dave's pulse stalled. A slow death for the boy! What might that mean? Slow poisoning?

And then he saw that Celia was prying at the heavy but rust-encrusted catch of the window, which she had lubricated with the oil from one of the sardine-cans. "I'll always eat the dear little things in olive oil after this!" she murmured with an attempt at a smile. The bolt moved a fraction under Dave's own strong fingers. Both their hearts lifted with sudden hope. When darkness fell, they would be able to open the window. If, by a miracle, they could find the boat—

"Look!" whispered Celia.

From behind a mossy wall the small figure of brother Jonathan appeared, moving leisurely. He threw a stone at a crow which croaked on the branch of a tree; then, whistling rather disconsolately, he stared through the trees at the gray water and the bleak. All at once he brightened, and went down to the water's edge. The two watchers saw him pull at a mooring-rope, and the prow of a small boat hove into view.

"We're going to make a dash for it now, Celia," said Dave. "There'll never be any chance like this again."

"I wonder—" began Celia; then her lips shut tight. "All right. I'm game, Dave."

There was no sound about the island, save the drowsy hum around some unseen wasp-nest, and the cawing of crows in the distance. It was a silence that frightened Celia Beniston, for some reason. The window came open almost without noise. The leap down into grass that grew thick and deep as far as the water was no more than a few feet. Jonathan did not see them coming. He

was in the boat, whistling cheerfully now. The grass swished beneath their quick footsteps; then they heard a low guffaw, and the bidding came:

"Stop right there, li'l' children!"

"Thus far and no farther!" said another voice.

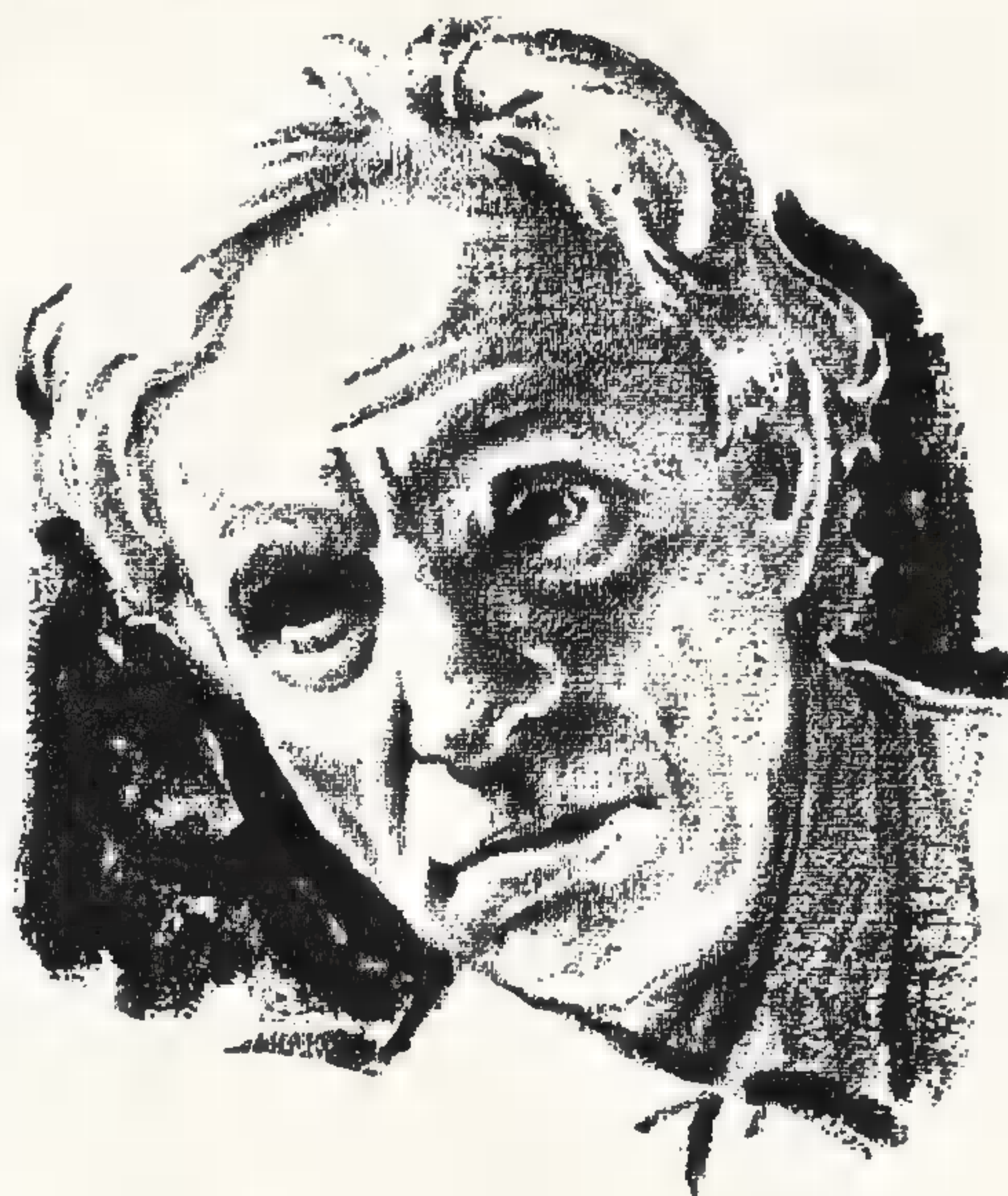
The Creyne brothers sat on a smooth piece of rock not two yards from the path to the boat. Frankie Creyne stared at them with round mouselike eyes, and Everard toyed as though apologetically with the pistol he held in his lap.

"Trying to leave us!" reproached Frankie Creyne. "And Everard such a guy with his gun, drunk or sober! He could have got you from any part of this darned island with his eyes shut. In fact,"—his voice dropped and the two brothers snickered together as the figure of Mrs. Barstable appeared, big and gaunt before the wall in the near distance,—*"he could get anybody. Friend or foe, as you might say. But don't tell anybody we told you."*

Dave's hands closed hard as he stood there. There was something not quite human about the two men, even in their deep complicity with each other; yet at the same time they were degradedly real. Souls lost long ago, in the jungle life had become for them since the Dorleigh smash, and perhaps before.

"Get back, Mr. David-boy Dorleigh." Everard's glazed eyes blinked as he waved his weapon. "Sallendine sent that lad to the boat. It was arranged. Gotta have a joke. No pictures or night-spots or anythin' like that here. Besides, Lady Barstable wants to speak to both of you."

CELIA could look at the two men with courage, though they held death in their hands, because she had never been afraid of animals, even savage ones. But Mrs. Barstable turned her mouth dry with mingled fear and pity to look at. Yet there was nothing else for it. Frankie Creyne swung himself from the stone and came forward. As she hesitated, Dave tensed his muscles to make a spring at him that would probably mean an instant bullet from the other brother. To prevent it, she turned, and Dave followed her. In the boat on the edge of the lake, Jonathan stood quite dumfounded by the scene. Then all at once Joe Sallendine appeared, stepped into the boat and rowed away with Jonathan, explaining something which seemed to satisfy the boy, for he turned with a relieved grin, and waved his hand.



EVERARD CREYNE

"Well, well!" said Ellen Barstable.

"Let us pass, please," said Celia.

"I'll take you in myself," said the woman softly. "You wouldn't know the way back, except to climb back through the window. And that's not ladylike for Richard Beniston's daughter. This way, please."

She threw open a door and followed them through a dank corridor. Celia felt a hand on her shoulder. It made her hurry. And yet through all her terror was that incongruous pity for the woman, which came from the tolerance and unwillingness to pass judgment that belonged to her nature and generation.

"You're a pretty thing," Mrs. Barstable said somberly, folding her arms. "I had a daughter like you once. Oh, yes, I had. On the West Coast, she is, and she thinks her mother happy and contented on the bit of money she sends her now and then."

She sat down. Her coarse face had softened only for an instant. But in some way she was changed from the greedy harpy who had put her hands out to the money in the office in Cracknal Street. She no longer wore her chinchilla coat or her crude jewelry.

"She's just as dangerous, though different," thought Celia.

"Joe Sallendine calls this Island House. I'd call it Go-back Island. You forget everything outside and go back eleven years. We've all gone back. Take Joe Sallendine. He's back to when his

kid died. Mind you, he's grown fond of that lad Jonathan. But that won't make any difference. Then there's Frankie and Everard Creyne, whose young sister drowned herself. They'd forgotten all about it, but it's come back to Everard. Good and well! Frankie's an angel compared to Everard. Well, there's a lot of water here, Miss Celia Beniston." Her eyes seemed flat in their sockets as she gazed at Celia and repeated: "A lot of water. I don't know what they'd do to you, Dave Dorleigh. You're your father's son, so they may give you the same medicine they gave him. Then there's me. My man hanged himself, after that crash. Well, there's a good chance of me getting all my own back, now Gerald Dorleigh's gone. And when the truth comes out—as come out it will, now—there's a good chance that Richard Beniston will do the same too. Not hanging, maybe. A pistol at the forehead. It's more genteel."

"I don't think he will, Mrs. Barstable," said Celia, though a chill shook her.

There was a silence in which Ellen Barstable rose from her seat. Dave spoke to her, as she was going.

"You know, Mrs. Barstable, I should say you were in some danger yourself. Both you and Sallendine. Those Creyne men will go a long way to get all the loot into their hands and make a dash from here before the police arrive. It's a hanging job for them already. Just a friendly warning."

"Shut your mouth!" snarled the woman. The heavy door crashed behind her; the big key she carried ground in the lock. Celia told herself that none of this was what it seemed, and somewhere it had its light side, though it was hard to find. Deliberately she tried to shut out the memory of what Ellen Barstable had said about her father, but only half-succeeded. It danced like a specter before her, the thought of that grim avenue of escape which so many men before him had taken when dishonor and disgrace overtook them.

WITH hardly a movement on her part of either, she found Dave holding her close. She heard him laugh, and before she knew it, a low laugh that had indestructible happiness in it came from herself, as she looked into his face.

"Will you be my wife, some day soon, Miss Beniston?" he asked. "And to hell with the Four Pitiful People or anybody else?"

Her head went up.

"I should love to, Mr. Dorleigh," she answered. "So long as you make the some day *very* soon. But not in an airplane or anything like that, please. At the Little Church Around the Corner—or at St. Thomas', with pomp and circumstance, Richard Beniston, the bride's father, leading Mrs. Gerald Dorleigh, the bridegroom's mother, into the church, Brother Jonathan, with a lot of pomade on his hair, acting as best man; and the honeymoon—oh, anywhere deep, deep in the country where we can have each other and—begin to live."

The lips that Dave's lips sought, shook a little. She thought to herself: "*Unless we get into the war, and they all begin to die. If that happens, we'll be no worse than anybody else, and we may get some kind of a kick out of it.*"

AFTER a time Celia freed herself. It seemed to her that a shadow which moved outside the window was that of Ellen Barstable—not that it mattered. She and Dave had made known their love to each other—not that that mattered either perhaps. A wind began to sing among the pines; darkness was not far away, though it was still light. In Dave's hand there now hung a heavy andiron which he had found hidden away in the big rusty fireplace. Their brief, sweet moment had come and gone, and they could put it aside with a complete understanding that would have baffled Richard Beniston and his era.

Dave grinned tightly.

"I'm going to sit behind the door till morning. The first who comes in, gets this. Then the next, and the next after that, with luck. Gotta have our joke, as Mr. Creyne says. You can pull away the bodies, Celia."

The gurgle of the lake as the wind flicked it made irony of his words. "*There's a lot of water here.*" To those two unhinged brutes, it would be a joke to come for Celia in the darkness, and deal with himself at the same time. There was one frail chance: It might be Everard, the gunman, whom he brained before going down himself. On the other hand, it might be Frankie. Best not to think of the gamble.

A cloud of crows, wheeling in the red sky, ceased their clamor and flew across to some distant roost. When they had gone, there still remained a faint hum up in the sky. Something moved in wide circles above the hills in the distance. Restlessly it dipped into the hollows and

swooped over the higher hill-shoulders, dwindling, dwindling. A full five minutes passed, while they stood and gripped each other. Then the mists of evening hid it, and it vanished.

Dave spoke. "A Beniston Swift. It's searching for us."

"It'll find us tomorrow, Dave!"

"Sure thing," he agreed, trying to believe it himself.

A clock must have been wound up and started somewhere in the house, for it struck a faint, husky chime at intervals. The octagonal window was a plaque of sprinkled stars. Celia's hand went out to Dave where he stood by the door, on a sentry-go that he meant to have last all night. Sleep seemed an idle habit which he had thrown off forever.

"I don't think Joe Sallendine will hurt Jonathan," she said. "Dave, I think those two have grown really fond of each other. There's all sorts of love. It sounds soppy, that, but I don't think Joe Sallendine could ever make himself do it."

The clock wheezed nine behind the wall. A wind sighed over the water. There was a faint rhythmic sound overhead, in the room which Mrs. Barstable had evidently taken for herself. Celia listened to it, and identified the sound. "It's a rocking-chair, Dave," she whispered. "They're scarce, nowadays, but I know the noise. I'll make a guess that she's keeping guard against the Creyne brothers, and letting them know she's awake."

Both of them turned with a quickness that betrayed the real tension of their nerves, as on the glass of the window a sharp but low tap sounded, paused, then came again. Dave held Celia back. It might be the Creyne brothers. Then as he crept near, he saw a small bullet-head outlined against the night sky, and a nose flattened against the glass. The tapping became more impatient.

IT was the lad Jonathan. He hissed a warning through his teeth, grinning excitedly as Dave opened the window.

"I'm not coming in, Dave; Joe said I mustn't. He doesn't know I'm here now. Joe's made me his bodyguard. I'm supposed to stick by him. He says he'll clear all the mysteries up for me when it's all over. You know, like the end of detective stories. It's all concerned with—with Gerald Dorleigh's murder, he says. . . . But I had to come and tell you what I've done to that low-life Everard Creyne."

"Come inside, Jonathan. We're safer, all in one place."

"No fear. This is the biggest job Joe was ever on, he says. He'll explain everything to us all when the time comes. But I don't trust those Creynes. I don't like that gun Everard fools about with. Joe draws the line at guns, he says. It was only part of the game when Everard pointed it at you and Celia Beniston an hour or two ago, Joe told me. But I think Joe's too trusting. I took it out of Everard's pocket when he was snoring, a few minutes ago."

"Where is it now?" demanded Dave.

"I chucked it into the lake," answered Jonathan with another complacent grin. "It's safer there."

"Listen, Jonathan—"

"Got to be going back to Joe. I know you don't like him, but you will when you know all the truth." The boy's eyes shone. "Gee, this is life, isn't it? Did you see that Beniston Swift just before it went dark? Joe says it's all in the web he's weaving, to catch the murderer. I've an idea it's Everard really, but Joe won't say. Anyhow, that plane came down in a hollow; it'll be up again in the morning, probably. Joe let me look through his glasses from an upstairs window."

CARELESSLY, Dave remarked: "Nor'-west, didn't it land? We saw it."

"Behind a kind of old stone barn on the slope due west. The crew have put up a tent, to sleep the night in. Joe says it's all okay; he knows all about them."

It was difficult to restrain the impulse to seize the boy and drag him through the window. Inwardly Dave groaned. Jonathan wouldn't believe a word against Joe Sallendine, and in that lay his deadly peril.

"Ok-y-doke!" the boy whispered, and began to move away. The two of them hung at the window, watching him.

A faint light lay over the lake and shone reflected through the tree-trunks. A water-bird squattered away. Something seemed to stir in the long grass and move like a stalking animal after the small figure of Jonathan, though it might easily have been imagination. Jonathan stopped and began to throw stones in the water, going close to watch the phosphorescent rings he made. But the figure that approached him did not stop—and it was not imagination.

Dave balanced himself in the rotten window-frame, then dropped silently into the grass. The man who followed Jonathan on hands and knees lifted his face, and the wide grin on it was that of

Everard Creyne. Noiselessly he reached the boulder near where the unsuspecting boy stood, leaned his weight on it, and reached out a long arm. In the same moment Dave Dorleigh jumped across the little space that separated them.

"Come on, Everard!" he said, in a low voice.

His purpose became clearer to himself all at once. It had a touch of craziness in it perhaps, but that matched everything at this place: It was first to drown the man who intended to drown Celia, and then to swim the lake and find his way to the hollow in the hills where the Beniston Swift lay.

He and Everard went deep together into the crystal-cold water. He came up first, and called sharply: "I'll be back, Jon! Look after Celia!" Then Everard clutched him. They went under again, but Dave was swimming powerfully, towing Everard Creyne as he went. As the man's arms locked about him, he drove at the pointed chin. He wanted to knock the man out, for unconscious men drowned more surely. There was no mercy left in his soul for this hangman's meat who would be better dead before he did more damage.

"Gawd, I can't swim! Save me!"

The wet eyes of the man glittered in the starlight close to his own; there was terror in them, though it didn't quench their craftiness. Dave levered the clinging arms apart; with a shout, Everard Creyne—with one murder to his account at least—sank like a stone. Dave turned on his side and struck out for the shore.



RICHARD BENISTON, in the big quiet room overlooking the lights of Chanford Bay Park and Manhattan beyond, stood with his back to the fire and faced a lean, casual-looking man in evening-clothes who sat in a deep arm-chair with an unlit cigar in his fingers. Beniston was obviously masking emotion.

"I see you've come to the conclusion that it isn't an ordinary case of kidnaping, Dysart," he said. "I don't care what it is. So long as I get my daughter back."

Dysart did not look like an agent of the F.B.I., but—to make a paradox—few of them do.

"We'll find her. . . . Queer that Gerald Dorleigh should be killed and Gerald Dorleigh's son should be in this business with your daughter, in the same two or three days. Your own men who followed them on your instructions established that. You can't think of any reason why they went together to that woman Barstable's office?"

"No. He was one of my pilots. And they were friends."

(Greenish eyes, Dysart had—deferential but piercing. What if he told him: "*I was equally guilty with Gerald Dorleigh. But I haven't served my sentence yet, the way Gerald did. So I let my daughter go try to buy off blackmail.*")

"We've checked up on some poor devils who called themselves the Four Pitiful People, who lost money in the Dorleigh smash," said Dysart presently. "You may remember them. A queer lot. We're gradually rounding one of them into the Chanford Bay Park murder. I wonder if they got some sort of notion that because you were once associated with Dorleigh, they could get something out of you by kidnaping your daughter? Only speculation, of course."

"It's possible. I'd give them a lot, if they'd bring her back safe."

He must shake off that feeling of fighting with his back to the wall. Nobody had any real proof. *Nobody!* A man like Dysart would see that short shrift was given to anybody who slandered Richard Beniston, of Beniston Aircraft, in wild statements. He moved across to the sideboard, then stopped, and put down the decanter. No use, that.

Dysart perceived the strain he suffered under, and presently took his departure. Beniston breathed more freely when he had gone. It was fairly late, and he was utterly exhausted, but he called up the flying-field for the fifth time that day. His planes had been out, scouring the open country since early morning at every point of the compass, but none of them had anything to report. One had a daughter; one betrayed a friend; one built thousands of airplanes to serve the country—but nobody could find one's daughter when she was lost!

His man came in silently with a tray. The man thought a tremendous lot of him. So did all the people who had sent him telegrams of sympathy, even when they hung round the radio, breathless for the news.

"A letter came just now, sir. We found it in the letter-box, but it didn't come

through the mails. I thought it might be important."

When the man had gone, Beniston slowly opened the plain unstamped envelope. His nerve was so far gone that he could imagine it contained a lock of Celia's hair, or worse, from the Four Pitiful People. But only a sheet of notepaper slipped out into his fingers. The writing on it was round and clear. He felt his fate closing on him invisibly as he read.

Eleven years ago, an hour after his sentence, a gold fountain-pen was delivered to you from Gerald Dorleigh, by his wife. It contained a message to you from him, a copy of which the writer of this letter has in her possession. She also has notes and letters which passed between Gerald Dorleigh and yourself in those days. They prove that you were equally guilty with him in the Dorleigh Trust swindle.

The writer of this letter will call on you in about an hour's time, to hear what you have to say before she hands these to the police.

The notepaper dropped in Beniston's nerveless hand. He crumpled it up, bent down and put it on the tiny blue flame that flickered over the logs. It was true, then, that tag about your sin finding you out! He was hardly curious about the writer of the letter. He was conscious only of a great weariness. Somewhere, Gerald was smiling at him, cynically but with a touch of pity. Of course, he could never face prison. Few men of his age could. . . .

Richard Beniston moved with his heavy but quiet step across the room and opened a drawer in the bureau. Celia's pistol was there, the blue automatic which one of his pilots had given her. He weighed it in his palm. That was the classic way for a big financier to go out. But he put the thing back in the drawer again. There was no hurry. He wanted, with a queer detachment, to see the all-knowing person who had written that letter to him. It was past midnight. She had a sense of drama.

He waited. It seemed a long time before his man came in again.

"A lady, sir. She wouldn't give her name."

Beniston half rose from his chair as he saw who it was. He sank back.

"Hester!"

White-haired she was now, but still the same calm dark-eyed woman who had



come to him, direct from the courtroom, eleven years before. Older, though, like himself. Tired, like himself. He tried to smile at her, and failed.

She did not offer her hand.

"You've heard nothing of them?"

"No. But, Hester—"

SHE made a gesture. "Both my sons are in this, Richard," she said slowly. "We've been fairly happy for—well, eleven years. For all I know, they may both be dead now, through your daughter, through all that miserable business you and Gerald worked together. I only had Dave and Jonathan, but I was content. I never claimed any part of that money, for them, did I?"

"No—although you knew about it."

She smiled stiffly. "I knew Gerald's trick with that pen and his miniature writing. I read it before I brought it to you. That seems a long time ago, doesn't it, Richard? Eleven years. If you had offered me my half share of that stolen money on the day I brought Gerald's message, I'd have refused it. But you never did."

"I never did, Hester."

"Gerald had so little conscience that he genuinely thought other people were the same. He gave me a bundle of your letters and notes to look after, with instructions to destroy them if anything happened to him. Well, I never de-

stroyed them. It's as simple as that, Richard. . . . And now I'm tired of keeping them. I won't have you and your daughter entering my life again, and—getting away with it."

"I'm at your mercy, Hester. You've been very forbearing."

He was conscious of a deep fatigue, which made him feel that he had had no rest for eleven years. Well, that would soon be remedied. If they found Celia, they would break the news to her gently.

"I'd better go," said Hester Dorleigh. "Dave has kept me in the dark about a lot of things. But then, I did the same to him. He's in love with Celia, I'm almost sure. When they know what I've done, it'll be the end of that."

Faintly, Richard Beniston smiled and shook his head. He said:

"Beware of that, Hester. You've grown hard, and I don't wonder. But those two are queer people from our point of view. They only hate one thing, and that is hatred itself. They've been brought up in it, like all their kind, and they're tired of it, though they're likely to be plunged into it up to the neck very soon."

Tears sprang into Hester Dorleigh's eyes. "Yes, they're ill-fated. Born in one war, and perhaps—killed in another. I wish they were both dead, Richard."

"No! They'll come through. They'll come through gallantly. And they'll build the world again, better than men like Gerald and I did. Infinitely better, please God."

Somehow, their hands met, as Hester rose. Both she and Beniston saw the flash of headlights on one of the curtained windows for a moment and heard a car on the drive. Beniston pulled the curtain and looked out, with a sharp intake of breath.

"It's your son," he said. "But my daughter isn't with him."

TO Celia it seemed she hung on with her hands at the dusty window of Island House for a long time after Dave had gone. She saw him and Everard Creyne, against the background of the lake, and caught the splash they made as they struck the water, but nobody else on the island seemed to. If they did, they gave no sign of it.

Celia bit hard on her underlip, trying to tell herself that Dave was safe, that he was stronger than Creyne, now that Jonathan had hampered the man by throwing his gun into the lake.

"Steady!" she murmured to herself.

Then she saw Jonathan. He had come from the water's edge to the window, and his teeth were chattering. Jonathan was not, just then, quite the self-possessed young apprentice-sleuth he considered himself. He was both scared and baffled in a most unprofessional way.

"Dave took Everard Creyne in with him. He's drowned him, or something, I think, and—and Dave's swimming across to the shore. What the heck's it all about, Miss Beniston? He told me to look after you, but—"

"I'm all right, Jonathan." Then she tried to smile, remembering sharply his unsuspected peril from Joe Sallendine. "But I'd feel better if you were in here with me. We could put up a kind of barricade till Dave comes back. I think he's gone to find that plane."

"But there's no danger. Joe says there isn't." Jonathan presented a picture of miserable uncertainty. "Especially now Everard Creyne is gone. Though it does begin to look a bit fishy."

CELIA nodded and agreed:

"It's a lot fishy, Jonathan. Can you climb inside?"

"I couldn't, Miss Beniston. Joe would be wild. He's got a kind of little crime laboratory fixed up here, and he's teaching me all sorts of things about fingerprints and poisons and disease-germs and stuff you have to know about in our line. He's such a clever bird that however crazy a thing looks, he has some reason for it."

"Come inside, Jonathan."

"No. He's got a radio-set, and from things he's picked up, he's sure we're going to be in the war. Joe thinks we'll be in secret service."

Jonathan turned as a whistle sounded in the dimness, and his name was called. He brightened.

"That's Joe; he wants me. He'll darn' well have to explain, now. But stick it out a bit longer, Miss Beniston. It's all in his plan."

He vanished, leaving Celia to bite harder on her lips. There was certainly something vaguely comic behind all the grimness. Now that she was alone, she could believe that Joe Sallendine was building up revenge for his own lost boy. He might love Jonathan, but in his twisted brain he might seek to live his grief all over again, using Jonathan, killing and grieving in the same breath. It was a freezing theory, and Celia didn't know what a psychologist might have

thought about it. What had Joe Sallendine in his "crime laboratory?"

"*I can't stay here,*" she thought. A clock beyond the thick wall chimed ten o'clock. Eight or nine hours until daylight. She struck with Dave's andiron at a rat that scurried over her foot. She was hungry, and nobody brought any food.

The wind was rising, lashing the trees and rippling the lake and turning the islet into an unquiet place. The Pitiful People did not seem to care whether she stayed in or went out, and so Celia climbed through the window and went out, though it required more courage than it would have done to barricade herself inside. At first nothing broke the pitch darkness to her eyes. But presently, at the top of the dilapidated pile that was Island House, a window, dimly lighted by candle-light, became visible. A gaunt shadow passed rhythmically to and fro across the wall. It was that of Ellen Barstable in her rocking-chair. To and fro, to and fro, the shadow went.

"One of them!"

Only two more to locate now. If Jonathan was right, Everard, the real killer, was drowned in the lake. In the wind that made a harp and kettledrums of Island House and its surrounding trees, Celia could move without fear of being heard. A minute later she stopped at the base of a round stone tower, and peered through an iron grating.

In the small circular room lit by a lamp on a table sat Jonathan and Joe Sallendine. The boy was examining something with an absorbed young face. The man, shoulders bent, smiling indulgently, watched him with great intentness. When Jonathan lifted the object up to the light, Celia saw that it was a small test-tube. With a smile, Joe Sallendine took it from him and placed it carefully into its rack.

NO use letting her imagination run riot, Celia told herself, creeping away from the grating. No use trying to do anything at that moment. No use thinking of a quiet madman and disease-germs. . . . But if she could damage Joe Sallendine's "crime laboratory" beyond repair before the night was out, she must do it.

Her throat felt dry. The desire to go back and hide herself until daylight grew overpowering. But there was Frankie Creyne. . . . Presumably he knew nothing about his brother's fate—though Jonathan must have told Joe Sallendine about

everything. Celia choked back a laugh. They had the inconsequence of deranged minds, these Three Pitiful People who were left. They all went their separate ways. It made her feel that she wandered about like *Alice* in Wonderland.

IT was the whiff of a cigarette that saved her from running into the very arms of Frankie Creyne, where he sat like a cat in the grass, watching the lighted window of Mrs. Barstable's room. In quieter weather, he would have heard her. But he did not turn. The wind blew a spark or two from the stub of his cigarette as he lit a new one from it. Motionless he sat there, and motionless Celia stood behind a tree-trunk.

Three cigarettes Frankie Creyne had smoked; then he took something from his pocket that glinted in the faint light of a star or two which still twinkled down through the trees. He seemed to spit on it for luck; and then, still like a cat, he moved to the vine-covered wall below Mrs. Barstable's window. Very slowly, he commenced to climb. . . .

Celia stirred her limbs, which were almost numb. This was what she had meant to happen when she scattered the money on the table before them; but much more grim, much more fantastic.

Frankie Creyne, to begin with, was going to kill Mrs. Barstable for her share of the booty.

Celia could see the dark, broken doorway, at a little distance from where Frankie Creyne scaled the wall noiselessly. When she'd slipped into the house to the flight of dark stairs, the steady thump of Mrs. Barstable's rocking-chair reached her. Every stair seemed to creak as Celia ascended, but she felt she must warn the woman. In the room above, the rocking-chair missed a beat, and then Mrs. Barstable began singing loudly. It seemed to be her method of letting any intruder know that she could hear them on the stairs. Her voice rose shrilly, menacingly: "*Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low, and the flick'ring shadows—*"

Then the door opened to Celia's thrust. The woman paused and stared at her, as she said quickly:

"One of the Creynes is climbing up to your window, and he's got a—a knife. I've just seen him."

"That'll be Frankie," replied Mrs. Barstable, with instant calmness. "You go into the corner there, out of the way. I'll keep on rocking, so he'll think I don't know. I'll settle him—the wet-

nosed little whelp!" added Mrs. Barstable under her breath.

Again the rocking-chair started, and the wind blustered on the window, whining through the cracks in the woodwork. Celia saw now that the big, gaunt woman had a heavy clubbed stick in the fold of her dress, and she was working the rocking-chair imperceptibly closer to the window. A hand came up outside the dark glass. Under cover of the window and the squeak of the chair, Frankie was expertly using his knife on the catch. Mrs. Barstable never looked round.

The wind gusted in as the window crashed open and Frankie leaped inside. He was quick, but Ellen Barstable was quicker. Her short stick slashed at his hand, and the knife went rattling across the uncarpeted floor. It was all over in a second. Frankie Creyne, his face wry with anguish, stood hugging his hand, and Mrs. Barstable came out of the chair, swinging her club like a New York City policeman.

"This is a rat-stick," she said. "For killing rats. Get out of this."

FRANKIE CREYNE fled. Mrs. Barstable sat down again, and looked for a long time at Celia. At last she spoke.

"Why did you do it? I'd have thought it would just suit you. You're not a holy angel, I don't suppose."

"I don't approve of murder, Mrs. Barstable."

"Or suicide?"

"No."

"I don't know that I do myself," said Ellen Barstable a little wearily. "I told you this was Go-back Island. I've been rocking in this chair and going back, for hours and hours. But there's no going back. There's always something fresh happening—like you. Has Everard tried to drown you, yet?"

Celia replied; she tried to keep as fantastically calm as the woman herself:

"He himself is drowned, I think. And Dave Dorleigh's got away to get help. If Joe Sallendine does Jonathan any harm, he'll have to pay for it."

"Joe Sallendine? He's a queer customer. He wouldn't take a cent of that money you brought us. I swear he meant to at first—" Ellen Barstable pressed a hand on her cheek, and went on as though talking to herself: "There we were, eleven years ago. I was a stringy bit of meat even then, but my man was fond of me. I thought my life had ended. Joe Sallendine thought his had too, and

even the Creynes were fond of that sister of theirs. We were genuine, though not as pitiful as the newspapers made out. But as the years passed, we went bad, all of us. When Joe gathered us together again, we were ripe for mischief. Like all the rest of the world, it seems to me. War to the knife! And what's the use, Miss Celia Beniston?"

"I can't answer that," said Celia. "But there it is."

Her breath checked. There were eight hours or so before daylight, but Dave might get into touch with the police before that; on the other hand, if he found the Beniston Swift, he would be able to get to New York as quickly as he could get to any country police-station. That was the sort of change men like her father had wrought to the world, for good or evil. . . .

"I don't want any harm to happen to Jonathan, Mrs. Barstable, that's all," she said.

The woman looked at her. Her harsh face slackened its lines.

"He's Dave Dorleigh's brother, of course. I saw you two kissing each other, and as happy together in this old ruin as though you were on a honeymoon. When I had that office in Cracknal Street, I used to slip away and watch the weddings at the churches downtown. I was a regular wedding-hound. . . . It's a damn' funny thing, love. Joe Sallendine loves that boy."

"So he'll not hurt him?" demanded Celia quickly. She blazed out all at once: "Oh, don't be so callous! He's Gerald Dorleigh's son, and I'm Richard Beniston's daughter, but what harm did we ever do you? Anyhow, you did it for money, to start with. Well, you've got your money!"

Ellen Barstable stared at her.

"That's just how my Lily used to storm at me. Made me feel small, it did," she murmured: then, soothingly, "Joe won't hurt him, dearie, I'm sure he won't. You stay here by me till your young man comes back. You know, I don't believe that man Everard is drowned at all. Frankie wouldn't have dared to do anything without him. They're like Siamese twins that can't act without both halves agreeing. I'll bet the other half's alive."

AS she spoke, there was a creak on the narrow stairs, and her eyes narrowed to slits. All at once Ellen Barstable swelled back into her gaunt, formidable self. With a touch on the shoulder,

she spun Celia back from the door and stood there with her rat-club hanging.

It was Joe Sallendine who entered with a disgruntled Jonathan behind him.

"I've not come after your money, Ellen," Joe Sallendine said. He threw only one glance at Celia; then: "That's Frankie and Everard's lay. They're on the warpath. They've snaffled the boat, and they're prowling around, after blood. I thought we'd be better all together."

"Everard went into the lake!" said Celia.

"He came out again. Everard's a good swimmer. He's a good gunman too. But he aint much use without a gun, so he might have made his get-away while he was about it, instead of coming back to his brother. . . . Nice work, Jonathan!"

IN reply, something like a sob broke from Jonathan. The boy clenched his fists and scowled at his idol.

"Then why did you smash up the crime laboratory?" he demanded, his adolescent voice breaking shrilly. "It was a dirty trick, after promising to let me feel what a hypodermic needle was like! I thought you'd gone crazy—standing looking at me like a coon, and then suddenly chucking the test-tube into the fire and sweeping everything off the bench and raving to yourself. You *were* raving, Joel!"

"It wasn't professional, Jonathan, I admit," said Joe Sallendine with great gentleness. "No, it wasn't. Listen to my voice—it's shaking yet. Brainstorm, I reckon. Like the sort of thing the Finchley Poisoner I was telling you about had, though it was after he'd done it, not—"

"Not before, Mr. Sallendine," said Celia, so low that only Joe Sallendine caught it. She managed to smile, wondering at her own coolness in the face of all this. And Sallendine's lined eyes shut as though he surrendered to everything. It was comforting to put her arm about Jonathan's shoulder, and because he felt bitter at Joe Sallendine's unsporting action, he let her do it. A brilliant plan of his own was blown to the winds. It had seemed to Jonathan that, once Everard and Frankie Creyne were trapped in the crime laboratory, leaving a tear-gas cylinder working there,—Joe said he had one,—they were as good as in the electric chair. But Joe looked so haggard and funny that he held out his hand.

"Sorry, Joel!" he said.

Celia, for the first time that night, began to feel very tired, and she saw that

Jonathan's eyelids were heavy with sleep, though he fought hard to keep awake in order to share in all the excitement about him. They were both safe now. She knew that. Something had happened to both Mrs. Barstable and Joe Sallendine, something that nobody, least of all themselves, would ever understand. She felt so weak that, to her vague horror, her eyelids were warm, and she began to see a queer sentimental picture of the whole pitiful warring world. Then Joe Sallendine spoke again, softly.

"There's a war on, you know, damn them all! And they're starting the draft here. Don't you wish you were young, Ellen Barstable?"

"No," said Mrs. Barstable.

Her head sank. She looked at Celia.

"He'd make a fine fighter, that young man of yours," she said. "They're like knights in armor, those young fellows in the army combat-planes."

"Yes," said Celia.

After a silence, Ellen Barstable stirred herself.

"You two had better lie down," she said, brushing her hand over Celia's hair for an instant. "There's a sort of bed over by the wall. We'll deal with Everard and Frankie. They can't do anything. Everard's lost his gun, and Frankie's a wet hen from the feet up, besides having a broken wrist. . . . Don't these two look young, Joe Sallendine?"

"They are young," agreed Joe Sallendine. "Poor things! But they wouldn't be old for worlds. Not now."

THE wind had dropped, and in the comparative silence the squeak of oars in their rowlocks came from the middle of the lake.

"They've thought better of it, and gone," said Mrs. Barstable, going to the window and looking out of it. "But it isn't much use. You can think better of it either in time, or too late. It depends on your luck. There's a car by the edge of the lake, waiting for them. You can see its lights. It's the State police, I expect."

Joe Sallendine rubbed the window clean with his handkerchief, then looked out above the trees. The sky in the distance was lit with a falling white light that showed the old stone barn clear and stark like a pointing finger for nearly a minute.

"That's an airplane flare," he said. "They drop them when they land. That boy's back already. Gosh, how times

change! About a hundred miles an hour was their limit eleven years ago, and that's no time at all, hardly. Some of the fighters can do nearly four hundred."

"I want to get away from this place," said Ellen Barstable. "You can get a good stretch in stir for—well, it was kidnapping, wasn't it, Joe Sallendine?"

"It might be called that."

"Are you coming? There's the other boat."

He rubbed his beaked nose and spoke as though Celia wasn't there.

"No. I think I'll watch him a bit longer. Youth! It's nice to look at, Ellen, when you think so much depends on it. But it'll all be over by the time he's old enough—if they don't start another."

Ellen Barstable shrugged. She fitted a cigarette into her long holder and lit it. She sat down in her rocking-chair.

THE Beniston Swift soared up into the early morning sunlight out of the low grassy meadow, a few hours later, and the trees about Island House sank in an instant behind. Far ahead flashed the wings of another plane which carried Jonathan, piloted in solitary state by one of the B. A. crack test men.

"It's lovely up here," breathed Celia.

"It's lovely anywhere," averred Dave Dorleigh.

It seemed to him that he had done a good night's work after he had crawled ashore out of the lake and found his way across stream and bog to the camp where the Beniston Swift lay. At first he had wanted to return to Island House with the two pilots, for it was not easy to think of Celia and Jonathan there, with the dark hours passing slowly. And then he had learned from the Swift's pilot how State police radio-cars were working with Beniston planes. Within a minute the plane's signal sounded, and hardly five minutes afterward he was in the air, breasting a half-gale, flying on a lightning schedule to the home field. It seemed imperative that he and Richard Beniston should consult, and it was no later than midnight when he reached the house at Chanford Bay Park—to find Hester Dorleigh there. . . .

"Davel"

It was possible to turn and touch the slant of Celia's eyebrows with his lips as she leaned over to him in the cockpit.

"What now? Something about the war?"

"Hang the war. . . . Your mother was bitter, wasn't she? I don't wonder."

"It all went away as soon as she saw me. It was staggering to think she'd known all the time, and kept quiet about it. She promised to give me those letters like a—a lamb! We'll burn them together, Celia."

He said nothing about her father, but Celia understood. She loved Richard Beniston, and she loved Dave Dorleigh, and that was the end of it. There was a tremendous lot of blind love of every sort in the world; and sooner or later it would beat the hatred. Optimistic she was, to think that way.

The State police had caught Frankie and Everard Creyne, as they landed ashore, Frankie crying from the pain of his broken wrist and Everard like a wolf without teeth. Their trial for the murder of Gerald Dorleigh was certain.

"We'll have to lie to the police a bit hard about Joe Sallendine and the Barstable, to get them to drop any charge against them," Dave said.

Celia smiled.

"The great Richard Beniston might pull a few strings for them, if I ask him to."

She flushed at the phrase she had unwittingly used; the title she had heard Dave Dorleigh bestow with bitter irony. He said slowly, now:

"He is great, in a way. He's human. And it's true, what he told you. Only he could have used that money to do what he did, I suppose. Look at 'em!"

OUT of the east a squadron of great Beniston planes on their way to Canada droned majestically overhead.

"Your eyes are shining," Dave said.

"So are yours. We're both idiots. . . . If we get into that horrible war, you'll be in it from the start, Dave. What Joe Sallendine called a knight in armor. I don't think knights ever hated very hard. They just fought clean till it was all finished."

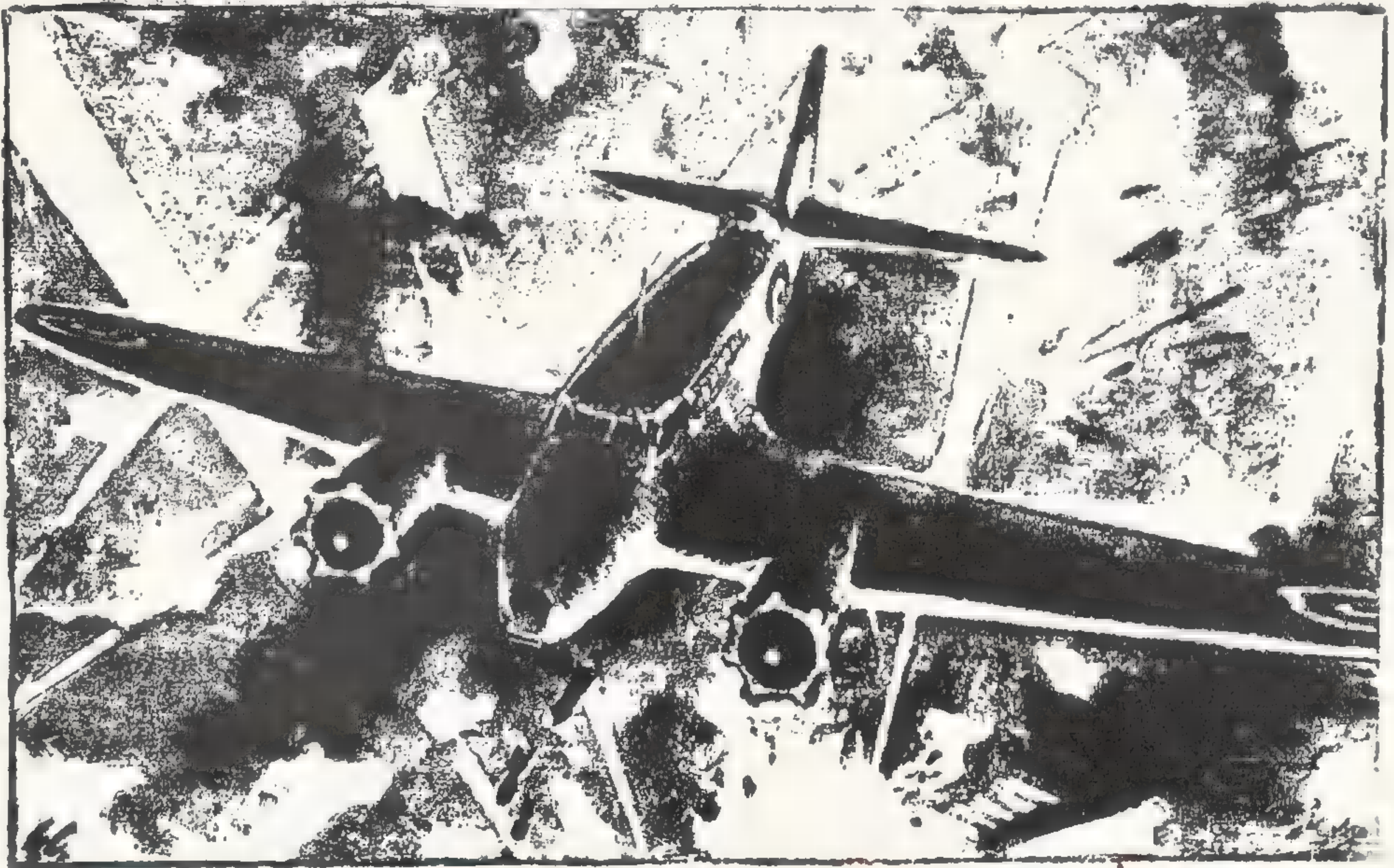
For an instant her voice wavered, but her eyes still shone. On the big air-field, when they reached it, the runways were clear, the ground staff waiting. Noiselessly they glided down. Celia stepped out after Dave, and they moved together toward the white hangars.

Richard Beniston, Hester Dorleigh and Jonathan watched them through the windows of the control-tower, then went down together to meet them.

THE END

REAL EXPERIENCES

For details of our Real Experience story contest, see page 5.



Bombing Berlin

Hazardous work, dodging searchlights and shellfire all across Germany and back; but—"None of us would have sold his seat in the plane that night for all the money in the world."

As told to **RALPH MICHAELIS**

I PUSHED open the throttle. The great engines roared into life. Our heavily loaded bomber tore across the airdrome, and we were off to bomb Berlin.

As we made our regulation circuit of the airdrome, I could see the planes of other members of the squadron standing ready for their crews.

As I set my course for the coast, climbing all the way, each man in the crew settled down to his own job. I was checking over the instruments in front of me to make sure that all was in order. The navigator, seated at his table with rulers and pencils, was busy with his calculations. The wireless operator was testing his apparatus by sending an O.K. to the routine inquiry, "*Can you hear me?*" from our ground station.

There was a low mist up to about 1500 feet. As we climbed out of this into bright moonlight, with a million stars stabbing the sky, we looked down through a mist as through an opaque

glass. The black-out was good, on the whole, in towns and villages, though there was the usual unauthorized glimmer here and there in country districts. But the headlights of cars traveling on the roads could be seen like glow-worms dancing in the darkness. In one district where there had been a spatter of rain, the effect was exaggerated by a white glow of reflection on the wet road.

It began to get chilly as we climbed out over the North Sea. Rather like a traveling workshop—all six of us, bomb-aimer, navigator, wireless operator, and gunners—all busy with our respective jobs.

The low mist cleared, and some low cloud banks rolled up as we approached the Dutch coast. As soon as we crossed the coast, the searchlight beams shot out toward us like thin silver tentacles. It was fascinating to watch them groping for us.

Sometimes the beam of a searchlight would strike the bottom of a cloud, and

then breaking off for five or six thousand feet, would come out again clear over the top of us. Soon afterward the cloud rolled away, and the searchlights groped nearer. I thought we were caught when one big fellow—a master, doubtless—actually shaved our port wing-tip. But he passed on without spotting us.

A few minutes later another searchlight fastened on us, and three more switched their blinding glare on to us immediately. While the airplane was flooded with a brilliant silver light against which we shaded our eyes with our gloved hands, we could hear the familiar *plop, plop, plop* of anti-aircraft shells bursting around the plane. As their shooting was not yet very accurate, I did not want to waste time and petrol with evasive action, and continued to fly on my course.

The first section of searchlights handed us over to a second section, and this section handed us over to a third, like a Rugby football three-quarter line passing the ball.

After we had been passed over a number of times more to other searchlight sections, the anti-aircraft fire started to get uncomfortably near. One shell-burst tossed the big machine a hundred feet up into the air as the splinters went rattling against the underside of the starboard wing.

I dodged away with a tricky maneuver of my own, which I do not propose to divulge, as it has saved me a good many times, and I hope it will continue to do so in the future; and the searchlights lost us for the time being.

And far across Germany thousands of searchlights groped their way across the sky—sometimes catching us and passing us across to their friends, but more often missing us.

Anti-aircraft fire was pretty heavy over most of the journey, but I only dodged when it came dangerously close.

My crew and I were all plugged on to one another on the inter-communication telephone; but superfluous conversation is not encouraged in the air; and with the exception of an occasional checking of the course with the navigator and a request from the gunners to be allowed to test their guns by firing short bursts, we had hardly exchanged a word.

AS we approached Berlin, searchlight activity and the "*flak*" or anti-aircraft fire, got very hot. The target was easy enough to recognize, as we had been

shown detailed plans and photographs of it before leaving home. I made a trial run over the target, which stood out clearly in the moonlight; my bomb-aimer phoned that we were off to the right of it.

I ran across it again, but he was not quite satisfied, as I had overrun it slightly that time. I ran over again, this time through a perfect hurricane of anti-aircraft fire; but we let them have it even hotter.

As I banked the machine round in a sharp turn, I could see the flames of a great fire licking upward, and acrid fumes filled the plane as huge clouds of smoke belched skyward. I had been too busy to see the actual dropping of the bombs; but the crew who had, said that there had been huge explosions, followed by a tremendous burst of green, red and yellow flames hundreds of feet high.

We were delighted, but still busy. As soon as the searchlights and anti-aircraft fire gave us a short rest, my second pilot tapped me on the knee, and took over the controls.

THERE was plenty of searchlight- and anti-aircraft activity all the way to the coast; but we only saw one fighter. He hung about out of range and was undecided whether to attack or go home—and in the end his homing instinct got the better of him, and he sheered off.

As we crossed the English coast, we got in touch with our home station, but the weather was clear, and we did not need any wireless assistance in getting home.

It had been a fairly straightforward job, except that the target was Berlin, and that being so, none of us would have sold his seat in the plane that night for all the money in the world.

Most of the hard work in connection with this raid had been done on the ground beforehand. Every detail of our route, the known defenses along it, and the target, had been given to us before we set out. During a conference with the C. O. and the Intelligence Officer in the pilots' room, we had examined films, photographs and contoured maps of the vicinity of the target, and we had been informed of every known snag we were likely to meet. . . .

As we enjoyed our eggs and bacon after seven hours in the air, I thought of the months of work, dozens of men, and a good many crews beside our own which had gone toward the successful bombing of Berlin last night.

Inside Gibraltar

By CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG

(Continued from page 5)

than ordinary interest. To botany, Gibraltar has contributed over 517 species; to paleontology, great quantities of fossil remains, from the rabbit to the elephant; to anthropology, artifacts and the famous Gibraltar skull of the Neanderthal type.

The Rock, like all compact limestone, abounds in caves and fissures. Formerly wolves and wild boars inhabited it. To-day a few badgers and foxes prey on some of the 335 species of birds which nest there, and on the small but numerous rabbits which warren amongst its rocks. Inhabiting the numerous caves on the precipitous East Side is that elegant little creature the genet cat, and the famous Barbary apes maraud respectively the garrison chicken coops and fruit gardens, yet enjoy as complete immunity as do the storks in Holland or the ibis in Egypt.

IN one cave the human remains of thirty-six persons were found. Of its five important caves, that known as St. Michael's, a thousand feet above the sea, holds the greatest fascination. I had the unusual privilege of going with Lieutenants Matthews and Opie, of the Royal Garrison Artillery, to the highest point of the Rock and paying a visit to this cave. Through the narrow entrance of its mouth I entered a natural lofty hall with arched vaulting supported by stalactite pillars from thirty feet to fifty in height, suggesting a great Gothic cathedral. With a couple of soldiers, each carrying a two-wick candle, we explored its mysterious depth, whose ends have never yet been reached, though men have lost their lives in the attempt. Our lights seemed dull and low and we very insignificant, in the great yawning blackness. In one inclined fissure millions of bats flew by, brushing our heads in an endless stream, as we slipped and picked our way over the slimy coating of guano which covered the rocks.

"This cave," said Lieutenant Matthews, "is said to go under the Straits and

to have its other entrance in Africa. Tradition has it that it was by this route the ancestors of our Barbary apes came to Gibraltar, and that if they ever abandon the Rock, it presages the fall of Gibraltar."

Only yesterday a news-story reported that the Gibraltar apes, disturbed by the bombing of the Rock, were leaving it for Spain. Propaganda or not, the Barbary apes would intelligently seek their bomb-proof shelters in the quiet caves of the east side of the Rock. If they did decide to leave it, they would undoubtedly prefer the route of their traditional arrival, rather than to go hopping across the open stretch of the Neutral Ground to the little town of La Linea.

Italian troops are now massing toward Egypt and Arabia, and aërial attacks have been made on Gibraltar for the first time in its history. Soon, in all probability, will come the supreme test.

As a fortress Gibraltar is the world's most finished product, with its bastions, masked batteries, redoubts, and tier upon tier of fortifications. But the most remarkable features lie hidden in the bowels of the mountain. They are the man-made artillery galleries, tunnels and chambers hewn out of the solid rock, in which are stored vast supplies of ammunition, food, water, fuel and other necessities.

Since the Great Siege 169 years ago, army engineers have been incessantly increasing the efficiency of this fortress, taking every advantage of its natural features. The most remarkable works of all are the unsurpassed galleries and their continuances which honeycomb the North Front of the Rock.

The original idea of the galleries is credited to Sergeant Ince. During the Great Siege, the British had been much troubled by Spanish batteries. One day General Elliot exclaimed, "I would give one thousand pounds to anyone who would tell me how to bring a flanking fire

REAL EXPERIENCES

on those works." The Sergeant stepped forward with his suggestions. Work with convict labor was begun at once, under Lieutenant Evoeth of the Royal Engineers, assisted by Sergeant Ince.

ONE day, with Lieutenant Matthews, I ascended from Casement Barracks some walled-in steps camouflaged by overhanging trees and vines and entered the galleries. Getting keys, we followed up to the first searchlight station, then to a second, overlooking the Neutral Ground. These galleries' stations, trim in finish and paint, reminded me of the inside of a battleship turret. The searchlights are so powerful that, sitting in a room in Algeciras, five miles away, one can read comfortably by their light. These searchlights were for Spain. The British didn't trust Spain then, and don't now.

At intervals the long lines of galleries are pierced with embrasured portholes blasted out of the tough limestone rock which not only serve for guns but admit light. They are divided into upper and lower ranges, called respectively Windsor and Union Galleries. The Union Galleries are partly under cover and partly open. The Windsor, or upper range, contain two magnificent halls: Cornwallis, and St. George, where Nelson and his officers dined in state on the eve of Trafalgar. Between Windsor and Union are other lines of galleries of marvelous size and strength, and even more vast and wonderful in their construction. In fact, one can walk for hours by endless rows of cannon which command the isthmus and the Spanish territory of La Linea and beyond; yet these galleries are but a section of the great labyrinth where, for well over a thousand years, man has gnawed his way everywhere into the core of the Rock, as a worm honeycombs an apple, until its interior is a complicated maze, with caves, galleries, passageways, stations, chambers and fissures, natural and artificial. Few officers know them in their entirety.

In a modern siege even a Rock Scorpion could hardly expect to exist in the open under the withering fire of modern artillery. Hence the fortress would become a troglodyte city; for so vast is this maze, it could house not only the garrison but the entire civilian population within the bowels of the Rock, and provide for them munitions, food supplies and water for a five-year siege.

Can Britain successfully defend Gibraltar? Germany does not think so. Up

to now, Gibraltar has sustained fourteen sieges. Eight were withstood. Of the six in which the Rock surrendered, four were won by force of arms, two by starving out the garrison. It was once captured by sea. This was during the eleventh siege, in July, 1704, when Sir George Rooke, with a British squadron, took it in three days. During the unsuccessful seventh siege in 1435, by Henry du Guzman against the Moorish garrison, artillery was used against the Rock for the first time.

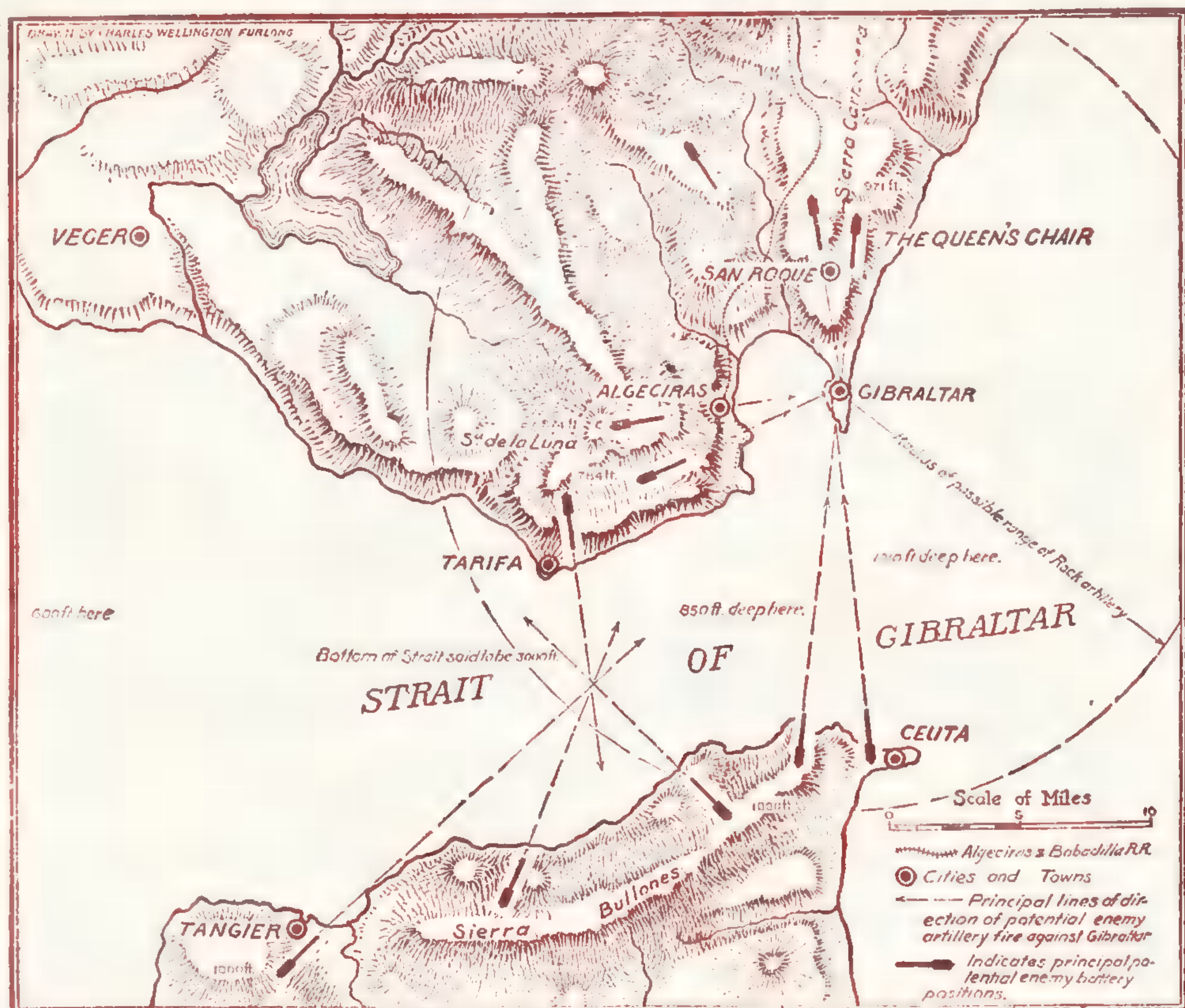
Britain's preoccupation with the American Revolution gave Spain the opportunity she wanted, and she began the Great Siege, the fourteenth and last. This "is justly regarded as one of the most memorable sieges of history," started by allied Spanish and French forces July, 1779, and lasted until June, 1783, practically four years. The smooth-bore cannon and mortars of the French and Spanish were able not only to reduce most of the town to ruins, but to destroy Rock Gun Fort on the very pinnacle of Gibraltar, at 1400 feet, at a cost of six thousand men and twelve million dollars. The English fired 205,328 rounds and eight thousand barrels of powder, and had 53 pieces of ordnance damaged or destroyed. Under constant bombardment, the garrison and population were without rest, afflicted with fever and scurvy, and reduced to semi-starvation. Although the heroic little garrison lost 1231 men, and suffered beyond description, it did not surrender.

AFTER peace was declared, the Duc de Crillon, commanding the Spanish forces, paid a visit to General Elliot. Being shown some of the batteries in the North Front galleries, he exclaimed: "These works are worthy of the Romans. Gentlemen, I would rather look on you as friends, than on your batteries as enemies—where," he added, "you never spared me."

Neither will the present British garrison spare any attacker.

The east side of Gibraltar is impregnable, for the great bastions of nature, the thousand-foot vertical cliffs, are unscalable and face only the open sea. The south end, at Europa Point, because of its high cliffs and strong batteries, is practically impregnable from the only point of attack—the sea. The north end, the only point open to land attack across the Isthmus, is impregnable until her powerful galleries' batteries and ma-

INSIDE GIBRALTAR



This indicates the area of operations in an Axis attack on Gibraltar. The assumed enemy gun positions are based on reports and the topography of the country.

chine-gun nests are silenced, and even then is only accessible from the west side.

The west side is Gibraltar's most vulnerable front, and her northwest corner her most vital point. Consequently she has left no stone unturned to fortify this vast slope from the water's edge to the highest crest of the Rock.

The waterfront of this west slope, which includes Gibraltar City, the Grand Parade, Alameda Gardens, and Rosia, a little flock of Ragusa set down in "Gib," is protected by defenses known as the Line Wall—a mass of masonry which extends from the North Front, to Rosia Bay, and encloses the entire base of the west side. This includes defenses on the moles, so placed that the latter can be raked with gunfire. Most of the Line Wall guns are of the large caliber. Some of the older type are mounted on the parapet, but most of the modern guns are in casemates, which are only a little above water-level, in order to be most effective against ships, and are of such structure and thickness as to withstand the impact and explosion of the heaviest shells. The barracks of the artillery

regiments who serve these guns are also within the Line Wall.

At the rear of the town, bounded by the military limit of the Unclimbable Fence, are batteries, overlooking the Line Wall, which can be fired over the housetops. Above these the great slope of the Rock rears up in a half-mile of apparent peacefulness. There it lies, sunning itself like a colossal sleeping lion; but when the hair of this Lion Rock is raised, the entire stupendous slope of the three-mile western side, from the galleries of the majestic North Front to the last battery under the eastern cliff of Europa Point, literally bristles with guns.

Two ancient parallel walls run up the west slope to the crest and shut off the narrow roadways paralleling the crest, which are lines of communication to the hidden batteries. Thus those walls defend the length of the Rock transversely. One, the old Spanish Charles V Wall, crosses and guards all the upper military roadways across the very center of the west slope of the Rock: the other, the Moorish Wall, serves the same purpose about 450 yards to the north.

Although on every important rocky tier is a gun-emplacement, and quarried gun-casemates honeycomb its rocky side, I did not see a gun or a gun-emplacement the entire way, as Lt. Matthews and I passed up the steep ascent to Highest Point. When just beyond the gateway at the lower end of the wall, Matthews asked me if I had noticed anything along this roadway.

"No," I replied, "except an occasional ring-bolt in the rock side."

"Well, you just passed some masked batteries."

And so I had, within ten feet of them, hidden among the low pines and shrubs bordering the path. The level skylines of structures containing these, and other batteries, are made irregular by artificial rock forms, also by painting irregular green patches on them so that they merge into the foliage of the Rock coloring. These exemplify perfect camouflage.

"But the ring-bolts?" I queried.

"They are used," the Lieutenant replied, "to haul up the big guns. A traction engine is attached to the bolt, hauls the gun up on a winch, then goes on to the next ring-bolt. It takes about eleven days to haul a 9.12 gun to the top of the Rock."

Farther up, we passed some reserve guns cached on the narrow roadway, then a "*pierre*" or stone mortar chiseled out of the solid rock, an invention used, in the Great Siege, against boat attacks. This "mortar" was loaded with twenty-seven pounds of powder and 1740 paving stones, but when fired, three-quarters of the stones fell within the Line Wall and did more damage to the town than to the enemy.

Although I had tea with officers at Highest Point, rules governing the inspection of the upper works, which form Gib's major fortifications, are so rigid that it was impossible to estimate the value of those batteries. As a matter of fact, only the most trusted British garrison officers definitely know the range of the guns emplaced there.

GIBRALTAR today awaits the opening of the fifteenth siege, the greatest of its history. The preliminary air attacks have already begun, and some of the town and naval base has been destroyed. The garrison has been reinforced, and the civilian population is being evacuated. This impending situation makes a consideration of this unique fortress second only of importance perhaps, to that of

Britain itself. The impregnability of Gibraltar can be seriously threatened, I believe, if the Rock is put on the defensive. It might be successfully attacked by a ~~sea~~ blockade, by land or by a combination of both.

A sea blockade involves the question of attrition by starvation, and presupposes the defeat of the British Mediterranean fleet. However, the British fleet still has naval supremacy of the Mediterranean. In a land attack there is only one approach by which infantry or mechanized forces can approach the Rock. This is across the narrow barren Isthmus from Spain, directly under a sweeping machine-gun fire of all the galleries' batteries of the North Front. Besides, between the British lines and the Neutral Ground is an artificial inundation; this covers nine acres, and the water is four to six feet deep; and besides this the British have just dug a sea-level canal across the Isthmus and undoubtedly have used the excavated material for a barrier and breastworks. Consequently an attack on Gibraltar must be wholly by land and air, with siege-guns and airplanes.

France based her defense on the Maginot Line and her strategy on a war of position. But unexpectedly Germany developed her strategy on a war of movement. Britain's strategy of the control of the Mediterranean at the Straits of Gibraltar is based on a war of movement, the movement of the British fleet; Gibraltar on the defensive means a war of position, and it is this that threatens Britain's continuing to hold the key to the Mediterranean.

IN withstanding a siege, Gibraltar must protect itself against Fifth Column activity, disease and enemy attack. Its military governor is in supreme control. Even in peace, he can expel any undesirable person, British or alien. All undesirables have long since been evacuated, and the loyalty of the British garrison eliminates the danger of a Fifth Column. Disease has often taken a far greater toll of beleaguered garrisons than enemy's guns; but now it is controlled through strict health regulations and modern science.

The entire drinking-water supply consists of rain water. With an average rainfall of 33.40 inches Gibraltar has an average annual yield of about twenty-four million gallons of good water. This is collected in great reservoirs of galvanized-iron sheeting, built over the en-

INSIDE GIBRALTAR

tire extensive sand slopes above Catalan Bay on the east side. From these collecting fields, about fifty acres in extent, the water runs into a channel at the bottom, from which it flows by gravity through a rock-cut tunnel into great bomb-proof reservoirs. Here it is maintained at a uniform temperature and so sealed that the smallest insect cannot enter. It then passes through filters *en route* to the reservoirs, where after remaining several months for sedimentation, it is drained off, passed through sand filters and finally aerated by falling in a forty-foot spray to its storage place. At intervals the water is bacterially examined and analyzed.

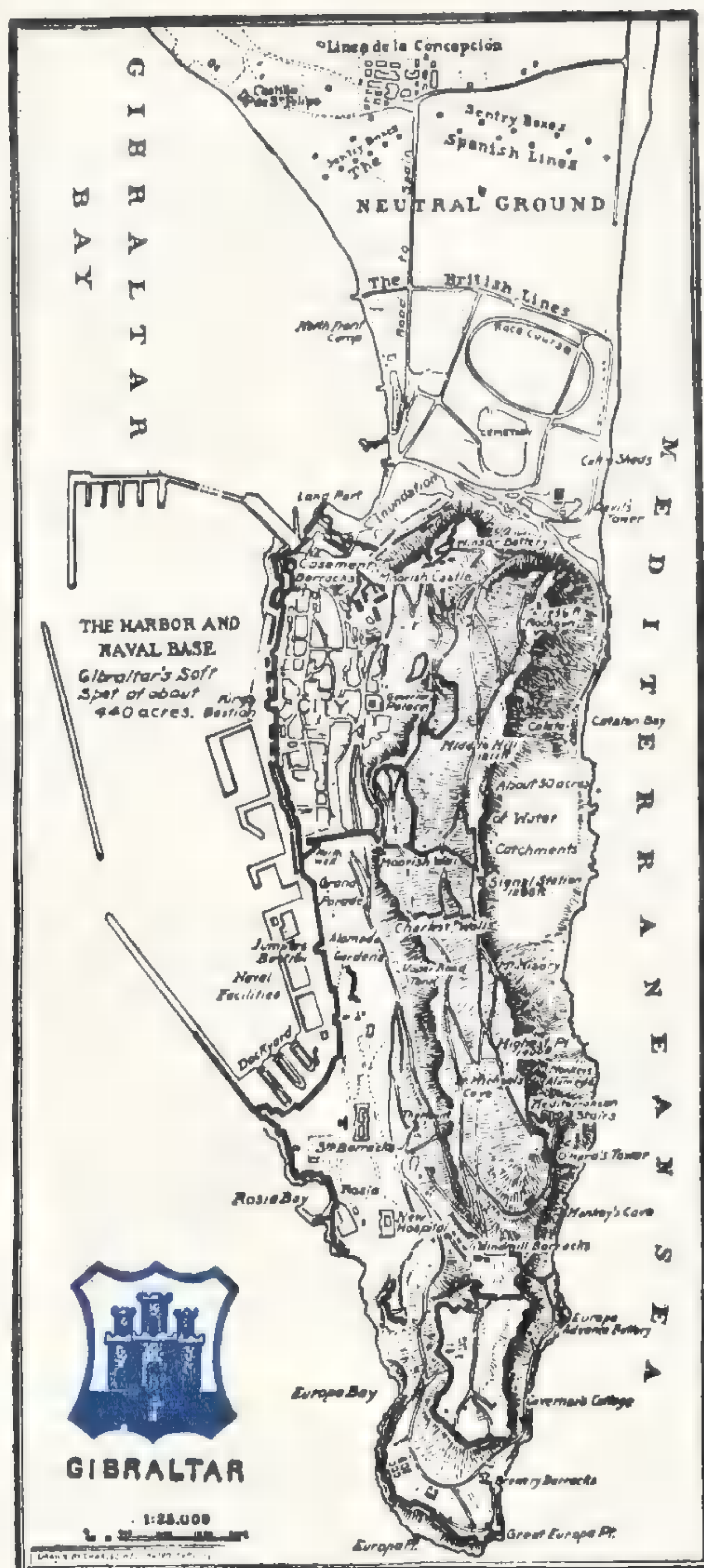
Springs were found on the North Front, the water from which is used for cleansing, fire-fighting and flushing purposes, and is stored in large reservoirs at either end, about halfway up the west side of the Rock. These springs give an annual supply of two hundred and twenty million gallons.

THE number of Gib's guns are legion. As to their caliber, 9.2's seem to be popular; Lt. Matthews informed me they were better than seventeen-inch guns, as they can fire more often, and as their shells fell almost vertically, it was almost impossible to locate the gun position through the trajectory.

His comparison seemed to indicate that there *were* seventeen-inch guns on the Rock. Guns of the most effective type, in the form of small batteries of B.L. and the high-angle guns, have been placed at advantageous places, chiefly along Upper Rock, where no visitors are allowed. Only the most trusted garrison officers know the range of the guns. Recent information indicates that new sixteen-inch guns and mortars of the most effective design have been mounted on her highest batteries, and guns capable of hurling shells twenty miles are now included in its main batteries.

Gibraltar is prepared to meet her ordeal, but the Germans have well evaluated the situation. During the recent civil war in Spain it is reported they installed, ostensibly in Franco's interests, a large number of huge guns at Cueta, Algeciras and at Tarifa. These batteries in carefully selected hill positions in the vicinities of these towns could serve not only for an attack on Gibraltar, but for control of the Strait.

Some of the most advantageous enemy gun positions are probably in the moun-



THE WORLD'S GREATEST FORTRESS

tains to the west and northwest, and particularly the north in the vicinity of the height known as Queen of Spain's Chair, (971 feet), a prominent part of the Sierra Carbonera, and about four miles due north from Rock Gun.

It may be assumed the British Intelligence knows these guns' locations. For years, the meets of the Royal Calpe Hounds have taken place in the rough Spanish country north of Gibraltar and its Bay, a block of hilly, mountainous terrain of about four hundred square miles. Ridden over time and again, it has been thoroughly mapped by British officer members of the Hunt—that too many foxes might not run to cover.

Gibraltar forms an obvious and established target, admitting constant hammering, not only in daylight, but even

in darkness, storm and fog. The enemy has the further advantage of being able to shift gun-positions and establish new ones, or of bringing up guns which may outrange those of the Rock. These advantages may ultimately result in literally pulverizing the Rock battery structure, including the galleries. But it is well to bear in mind that the entire surface of Gibraltar could be wrecked and still leave the garrison and the guns of its interior batteries safe within the Rock.

What makes Gibraltar really the "Key to the Mediterranean" is a strong and effective fleet controlling that sea. This Britain still has. But Gibraltar's fundamental value is as a naval base for Britain's fleet.

Since the beginning of the First World War, army engineers have not only worked unremittingly to make this natural fort impregnable, but have perfected a splendid harbor and naval base on the West Side, protected by moles, including three enormous drydocks capable of accommodating the largest battleships and cruisers of His Majesty's Navy.

The 440 acres of this harbor and naval base is Gib's softest spot, however. Although the approach is protected by chain booms and a mine-field and is well-guarded by the anti-aircraft and other batteries of her western slope and moles, the naval base is in full view from the heights above Algeciras, broadside on to Axis batteries to the west, and flanked by those of the north. A fleet remaining for any length of time within this harbor or just outside, though under the fortress guns, would be in jeopardy from enemy batteries as well as from air attack. Reports of some air attacks indicate Britain's fleet has already been forced, temporarily at least, to put to sea.

ALTHOUGH Britain may have protected hangars in the Rock at the North Front, she has no airplane fields at Gibraltar. This limits her flights from Gibraltar as a base, to aircraft carriers, or necessitates long hops from England, Malta or her Egyptian bases. Consequently her anti-aircraft guns are her main defense against air raids. We may safely assume that the Rock has its full quota of guns.

Even if the harbor is made untenable as a haven for crippled ships, for drydocking or extensive repairs, it would be difficult to prevent its use as a refueling and sup-

ply base, though such operations might be greatly hampered. Italy claims to have destroyed two of Gib's fuel-tanks in one of her recent raids. If true, this probably refers to some fuel-tanks near the dockyard—from which, by the way, a tunnel runs clear through the Rock to Catalan Bay. But it is safe to assume that the Rock engineers have provided additional oil-reservoirs within the shelter of the Rock itself.

THE Royal Navy's problem at the eastern end of the Mediterranean is to keep communications with Gibraltar open and the Strait closed to enemy transportation and water communication. The Rock batteries, plus the fleet, can effectively take care of nearly all surface craft in clear weather. The effective control of the fifteen miles of water between Gibraltar and the African shore is an open question. It is even more difficult to seal hermetically this entrance against the ingress or egress of Axis submarines. The width of the Strait of Gibraltar, its great depth of three thousand feet and the three-mile limit off the Spanish shore, on both sides, make laying a continuous shore-to-shore net barrage four hundred feet deep impracticable. Efficiently laid barrages, however, with sporadic shifting, would make the transit through the Strait for enemy submarines extremely hazardous. But blockade of the Strait is the Royal Navy's job. Gibraltar makes it possible.

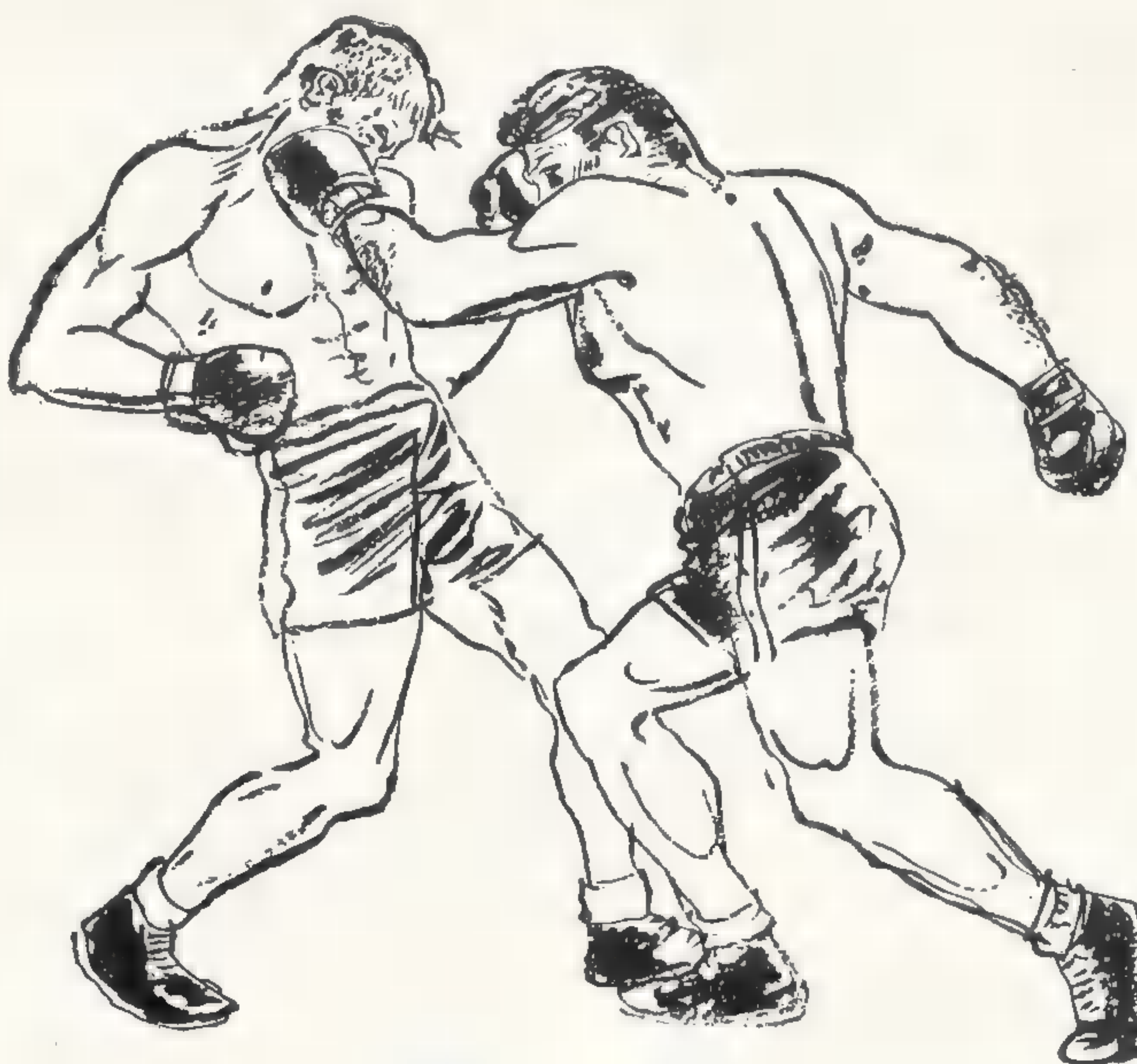
In Britain's hands, Gibraltar has stood for peace and the freedom of the seas. To that port all vessels of all nations were free to come and go, and to take on fuel and supplies. Tourists were free to wander about its fascinating Oriental bazaars, enjoy its gracious hospitality anywhere below the Unclimbable Fence, and were even admitted to some of the lower galleries. To its duty-free port, Gibraltar drew Spanish and Moorish traders from Spain and Morocco, Jews from the Levant and merchants from far-away India.

Gibraltar, an essential bulwark of Britain's traffic of Empire, has aided instead of restricted the free commerce of all flags, and has become a symbol of the Empire. The fall of Gibraltar means more to the world than the mere surrender of a mighty fortress. It might mean the surrender of those great principles which gave birth to the Magna Charta, the English Common Law, and the birth-right of free men—for a while.

Next month Colonel Furlong tells of his exploration of North Africa along the route an American army once marched.

A great champion carries on his own vivid story of exciting hours in the ring and out of it.

**By MICKEY
WALKER**



Bulldog Mickey

I WAS getting very popular around Elizabeth. It was something that come home to me, something I always looked for. It felt great. Popularity!

Uncle Dan's brother Joe Higgins took me in hand as my trainer. According to what I learned later Uncle Joe's methods was a little crude, but they helped put a strong foundation under me for my tough fights later on.

Joe Higgins arranged a homemade training-camp at Great Kill, Staten Island. Here Uncle Joe made me do all my boxing in the sand on the beach.

The most popular girl around the beach was Olga. To her I lost my heart and head. She was a few years older than me, and she enjoyed my youth. We were both good swimmers and got a great kick out of it, me thinking it was love all the time.

One day I had a date to meet Olga on the mainland.

I was punctual to the minute. Outside of me, I was all dolled up, but inside I was shaking like a leaf.

Olga was late! Maybe something had happened to her—I hoped she wasn't hurt. People get run over by buses, run down by horses—even railroad trains, which is why they have signs, "Stop—Look—Listen."

But all the time the sinking feeling inside of me like I had a bad stomach. Was she standing me up? I bet that was what she was doing! No woman was gonna make a fool—

No, she'd be here in a minute. A half an hour wasn't bad; she could have been held up by accident or chance, like the clock stopping on her. You're only young once. . . .

Two hours later my Uncle Joe passed by.

"Hello, Knockout," Uncle Joe says. "You waiting for Olga?"

"Yeah," I says.

"She isn't coming," he says.

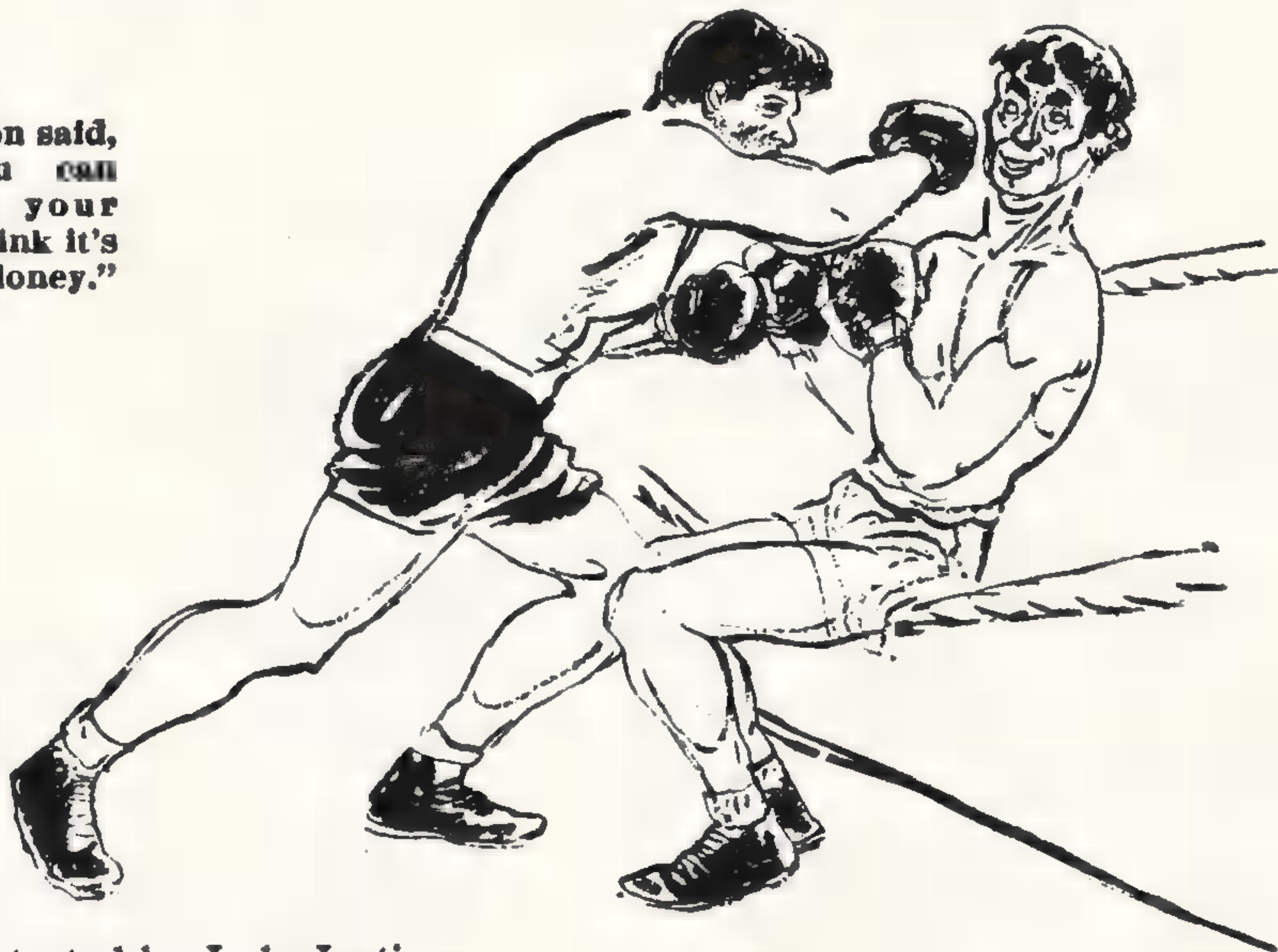
"Oh," I said. "She's a little delayed?"

"Well," Uncle Joe said, "when she comes, you'll have to take her husband along. She just got married an hour ago."

Ten years later I met Olga and her husband in Chicago, proud mother and father of a lovely family, and my best rooters the night I fought King Levinski.

(It was at this time that Mickey had a picture taken in a fighting pose that has remained his favorite picture. A peculiarity about the picture is that the line down the middle of the breast is clearly formed into two profiles, one facing the other. On Mickey's right breast, clear for all to see, is the profile of John L.

"Mick," Britton said, "I hear you can punch with your right, but I think it's a lot of baloney."



Illustrated by Lyle Justis

Sullivan, mustache and all. Facing John L. is a less distinct but recognizable outline of the face of Bob Fitzsimmons. The profiles are formed by shadows about the rippling muscles on the chest, developed by training.)

NOW the matchmakers was looking for somebody tough to fight me.

They sure found him. "Phil Delmont" had sixteen knockouts out of seventeen fights. Mine made seventeen out of eighteen.

I wasn't counted completely out, but I was on the floor when the bell rang at the count of eight. When the bell rang for the second round, it sounded miles away. I was getting up to fight, but Manager Johnny wouldn't let me. . . .

In a small way I got back at Phil. In his next fight he was knocked out by Lou Urban, and in Lou's next fight I knocked Lou out.

Years later I was in the Hotel Astor walking through the lobby when a fellow come up to me and shakes hands.

"You don't remember me," he says.

"Sure," I said. "Your face is very familiar—"

"Well, it ought to be," this fellow says. "I'm only the guy that knocked you out."

Phil retired from the fight game after the Urban fight, and now is a successful business man. . . .

Johnny Anthes and I was pals and partners for a couple of years. The fights I had under him I forget mostly, but one that stands out in my memory is the one with Benny Cohen in Newark. This fight gave me the start of a national repu-

tation, because Cohen was being considered as a contender for the lightweight championship.

Incidentally, among those present was Jack Bulger, who became my manager after Johnny. Jack and I are history now. When I lost him, I lost the greatest and dearest friendship in life. But I am running ahead of myself.

This fight with Benny Cohen was a slam-bang fight. Benny wasn't letting the chance at the lightweight crown go to an Irishman—not without him getting riled, anyways. We were both on the floor a couple of times. We boxed around the ring, back and forth. We stood and slugged with all the juice that was in us.

Cohen was a good boxer, a good slugger, and he was game. At first I thought maybe he'd brought a hatchet into the ring with him, but then I saw that my left hook was acting up just as good as his. We were hitting like sledge-hammers, like pile-drivers. The fans was standing on their seats half the time.

In those days there was no decision, it being against the law. Barring a knockout, the newspaper boys was the ones that decided the winner. And the newspapers all gave me the Cohen fight, unanimous.

TO me my grandmother was one of the most important people in my life at this time. She lived on the next street, and I spent as much time in her house as in my own.

My grandmother was a grand old mother, all right, a lady of the old school, and full of wise sayings from the old

country. She knew things about the banshee and Robert Emmett in the Wigelow Mts. She had things she would show me, like a real Irish shillelagh, or the pipe smoked by my great-grandfather. My grandmother was aces.

Now, Johnny Anthes, he matched me again in Newark after the Cohen fight. I forget the opponent, but just when the fight night came, my grandmother took sick.

I ran around my grandmother's house, and there was the doctor. I inquired of him how sick she was.

The doc looks me straight in the eye, then spills it. "Your grandmother," he says, "is in a fair way to die."

I went around Johnny's store from there.

"Johnny," I said, "you gotta call off this fight. My grandmother is sick."

"Ah, the old story," Johnny says.

"Listen, Johnny," I says. "Maybe you don't realize how serious this is."

"This fight is a sell-out," Johnny said. "The advance sale shows we'll be in the dough, and the promoter is hinting about making you a big boy."

"Call it off this time," I said.

"The promoter won't allow it," Johnny said.

"Call it off," I said.

"Not me," Johnny said. "You fight to-night, or else—"

"I don't fight," I says, and walked out.

A little later a neighborhood boy rapped on the door and hands me a note. It is my contract with Johnny. Written on it was: "*We're through.*"

My grandmother died a few days later.

FROM the word go, Jack Bulger and I were friends. He dropped around at my house one day as the matchmaker for the Laurel A. C.

"Where can I find your manager?" Jack says.

"You can't," I says, "because I aint got."

"Boy," he says, "you got one now. And your next fight is with Marcel Thomas, the welterweight champ of France."

"I aint going to France," I says.

"You will if I say so," Jack says. "Aint I your manager?"

From that day on we were like brothers, with no grudge between us.

Jack was a natty dresser. He worked in vaudeville, and was a buddy of John Bunny, the old Vitagraph comedian, before he got into the fight game. In my

opinion he would have become as great a fight manager as Kearns. Jack always looked up to Kearns as the greatest fight manager of all times. He wasn't wrong, because he is—but that is another story.

JACK never took a drink, but he loved Broadway and could get rid of as much money as any Broadwayite. He was a little fellow about five feet tall and weighed around one hundred and twenty. And full of fight. I remember one night I was in some kind of silly argument with a big six-footer in Newark when Jack heard me arguing. He ran over and pushed me to one side to face the big fellow himself.

Jack and me was a team. Jack kept me on the straight and narrow. Under him I became the welterweight champion of the world.

The first time I fought Jack Britton, the welterweight champ, was in Newark, in a twelve-round fight, no decision. It was before my twentieth birthday. Britton told me later I would have won the first battle if I had had more experience.

Jack Bulger had me believing that Britton was an old man, and all I had to do was to go in and hit him, and I'd be champ. But Britton acted very queer for an old man. He must have caught up with his second childhood that night.

For eight rounds I saw more boxing gloves dancing in my eyes than during the rest of my boxing career. But Champion Jack started to tire in the ninth. He would get over near the ropes, sitting on the middle rope taking a rest. And all the time he was talking to me:

"Mick," Britton says, "I hear you can punch with your right, but I think it's a lot of baloney."

This kind of talk would get my nanny a little, and I would wind up to give him one. When it came, Britton could see it a mile off, and all he would do would be to move his head half an inch.

"You couldn't break an egg with that," Britton said. "Do I have to show you how to do it?"

"I'll show you, you donkey," I said, winding up again.

I would graze his head, is all.

"What a weak one!" Britton says.

The champ talked his way out that night.

But this fight paved the way for the championship bout in New York a couple of years later.

The life of a fighter in his heyday is one big whirlwind. Looking back, it is

hard to remember that it was me in there doing all that fighting. Unless I look it up in the *Boxing Record*, I forget who it was I fought in Rochester, Kalamazoo, Kankakee or Muleshoe, Texas, in as many different years. Jack and I were catching trains and putting them down all over the place.

A fight audience is a fickle animal. They love a fighter; they love a winner; and they dearly love a knockout. Then when they have seen a champ for a while, they would just as soon see a new champ. They want their fights honest, but during the fight itself, above everything else they want blood. . . .

Many's the fight when after a sock in the button or a rabbit punch I don't remember anything at all after that round, even when I won the fight.

ONE fight I remember was with Jake Bartfield in Philly. It was advertised the winner would fight the champion. Jake was sort of a clown fighter, but a great fighter—as good a welter-weight as ever drew on a glove.

It was a packed house—they was hanging from the rafters that night; and the very first punch, I got a nasty cut on my mouth. The next round Jake got a bad cut over his eye. And our seconds wasn't able to stop the blood.

It was a slam-bang fight, a great fight. And above the roar of the crowd and all the yelling there was a very annoying high-pitch voice we could hear again and again. The crowd roared like a lion, and then would come this squeaky little noise in our ears:

"Jake—pull your pants up!"

We could see this little guy sitting near the ringside, probably yelling with everything he had, but what came out was a squeak that cut your ears:

"Jake—pull your pants up!"

Jake put me down on the floor, and I was glad to rest on one knee for the count of three or four and watch the blood drip from my mouth.

"Jake—pull your pants up!"

My left hook put Jake down where he belonged, with his bloody cut rubbing the canvas, but not to stay.

"Jake—pull your pants up!"

One time we socked together, and both went down, while the place went wild and drunk with yelling. Luckily we both got back in the fight, and still this voice came:

"Jake—pull your pants up!"

Jake slugged awhile. Then he shoved me backward. I staggered to the other side of the ring.

Then Jake put the thumb of his glove to his nose, and pointed same towards this little guy with the squeaky voice.

"Jake—pull your pants up!" the little guy squeaked.

Jake yelled back at him—a redhot come-back. Then to me: "Come on, Mickey," Jake says, "and fight!"

From that time on, the crowd forgot who they were rooting for, and began to stamp their feet until the city of Philly shook with it. And all the time they were chanting, *"Jake—pull your pants up!"*

I won the fight, but it looked like another on the train coming home. Jake and I were on the same train, both looking like we had been through a meat-grinder, maybe the same meat-grinder. When Jake saw me, he turned to Jack Bulger and said: "Jack, I didn't want to knock the kid out."

One fight I had was with Shamus O'Brien. Jack Bulger thought this would be a soft touch because Shamus had twelve kids at the time. I think we fought a draw, but he made me work for it as hard as I ever did for a title.

THE night I fought Jock Malone in Boston we came back to Newark and blew the whole five-thousand-dollar purse in Jackie Rosenthal's place.

Jack had been raving to me about a wonderful high-class girl he had met.

"How's about a knockdown?" I says.

Jack always allowed me a little recreation after a fight and its period of training. I never lost my hate of training.

A party was arranged in this girl's apartment on Park Avenue. It was a great party, and after a while the girls suggested a game of poker.

We all sat in. In about an hour we were all broke—all but Jack, who kept on playing. Finally, as we were getting on our coats, I heard Jack arguing with these Park Avenue dolls—only Jack wasn't doing none of the talking.

"You four-flusher," one girl screamed.

Jack's own girl that he raved about joined in. What *she* said was: "Get the hell out of here!"

So we filed out in disgrace, and names were heaped upon our heads like you never find in a book or dictionary.

"Nice girls," somebody says.

"Not so bad," Jack says.

He hands us back our money.

Mickey Walker carries on his story in our forthcoming February issue.

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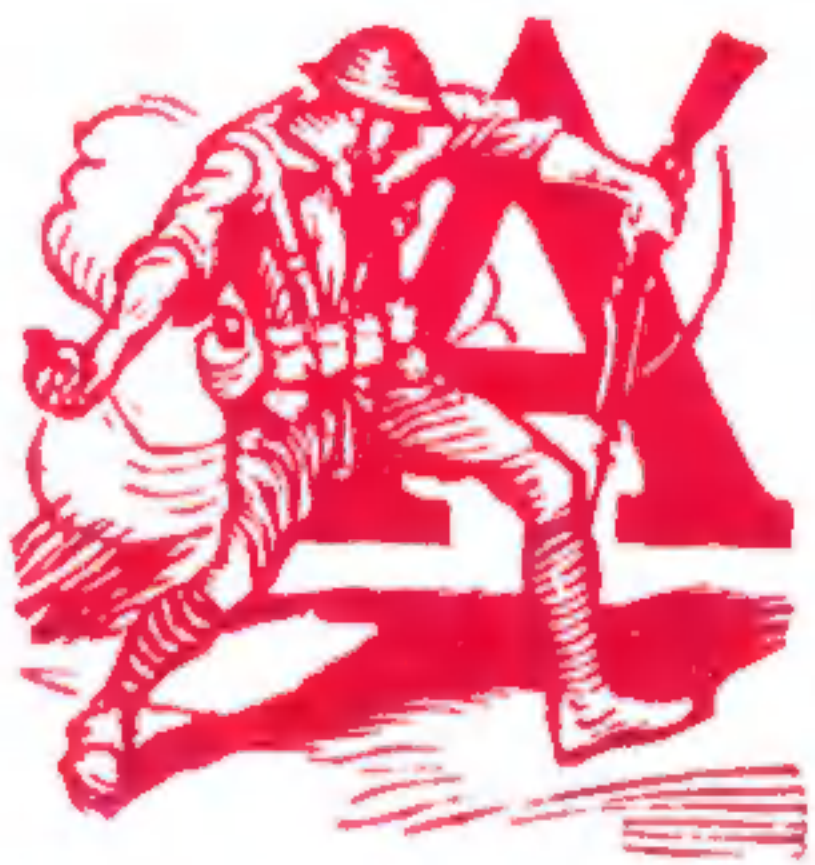
"You Can't Beat Beauty," by Philip Wylie; and the monumental epic, "Fame is the Spur" by Howard Spring.



An **A**merican **A**rm In **A**frica?



Photograph of a half-ruined desert minaret made by Colonel Furlong during his expedition to retrace the route of the American force sent to rescue the *Philadelphia's* men from slavery.



N American army once marched across northern Africa where the Italian and British forces are now engaged. Is it likely to happen again?

Colonel Furlong (whose article "Inside Gibraltar" appears in this issue) discovered the wreck of the American frigate *Philadelphia* in Tripoli

Harbor some years ago, and afterward retraced the march across the desert of the American force sent to rescue her survivors. He describes this extraordinary episode, and gives us an exceptionally well-informed discussion of this new phase of the 1940 war, in an article which will appear in our next issue—along with a wealth of short stories, novels and novelettes by such writers as George Weston, F. Draco, H. Bedford-Jones, Fulton Grant, Kerry O'Neil and Nelson Bond.

FEBRUARY ISSUE OF BLUE BOOK